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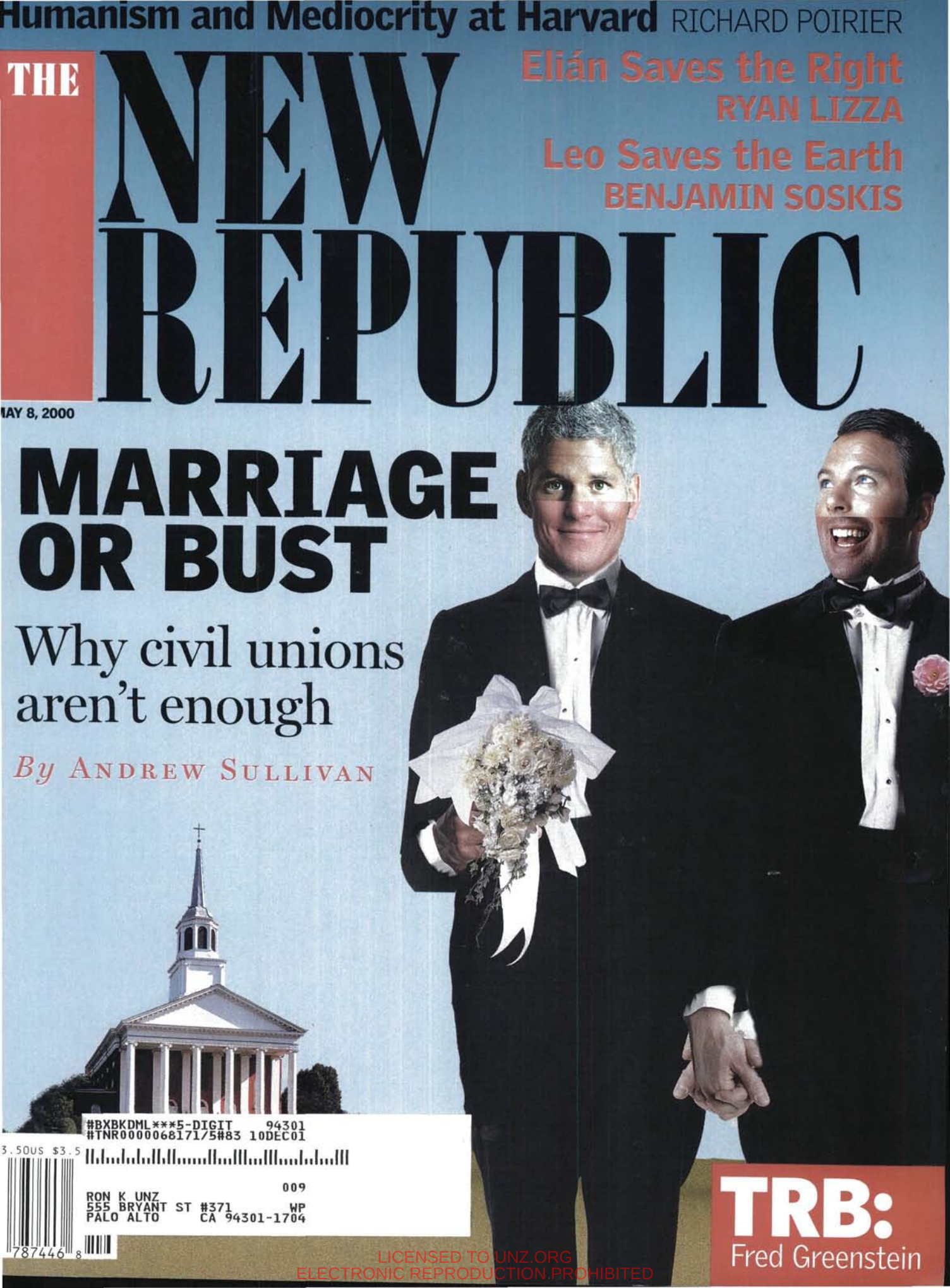

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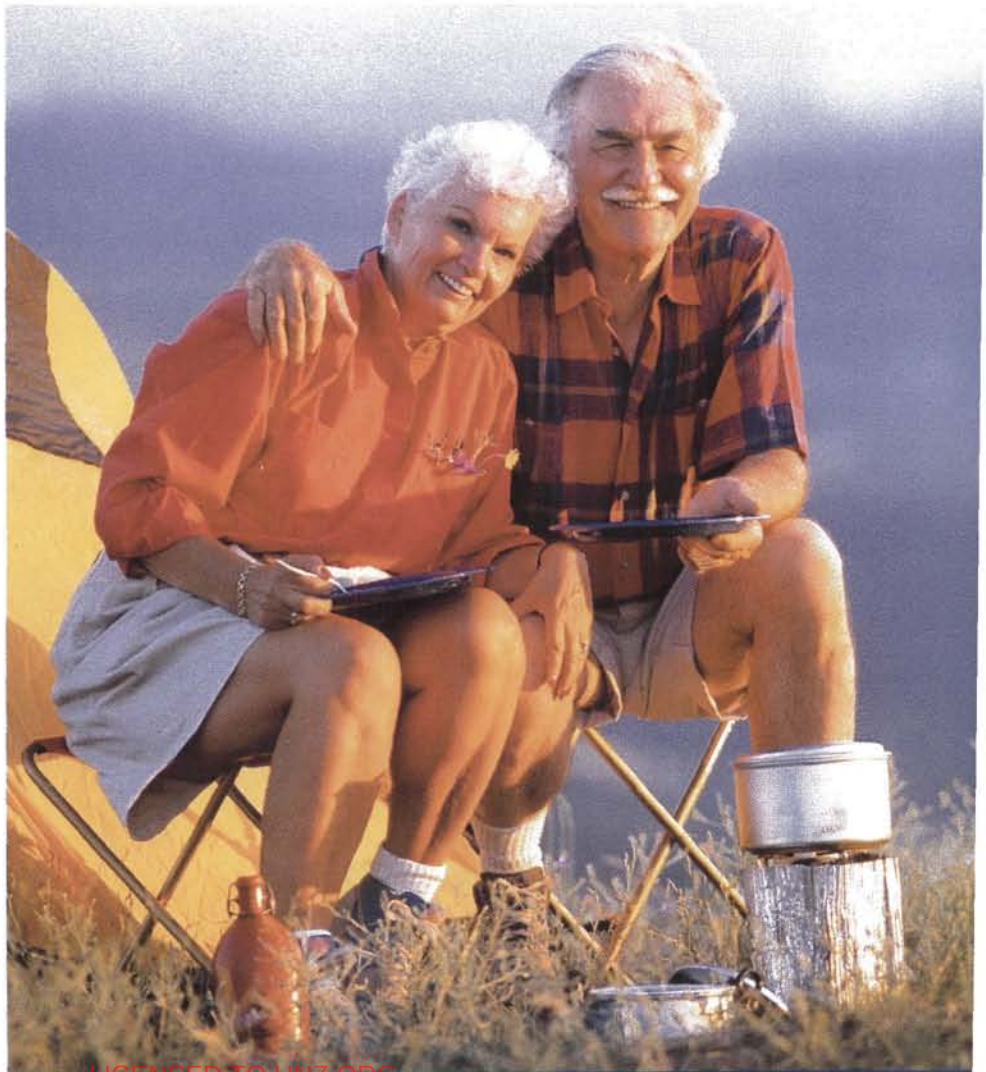

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MAY 8, 2000
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Hot air?

TO THE EDITORS:
John B. Judis's "Top Down" makes a valuable point (March 27). But, as right as Judis is about the prestigious Committee for Economic Development (CED), his enthusiasm for its 1999 proposals on campaign finance reform is misplaced.

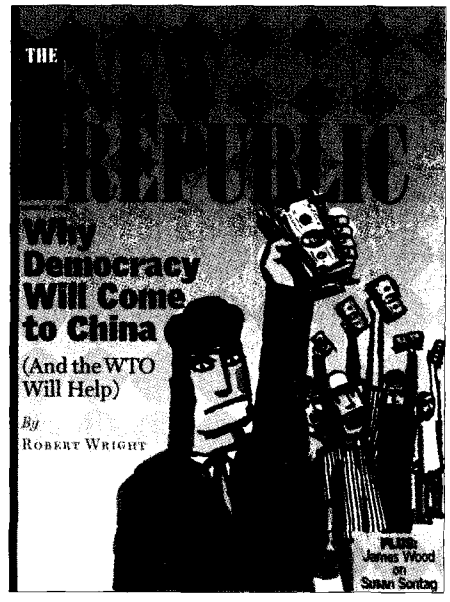
Campaign finance reform has always had a "devil of the moment." Today, soft money is the devil, and the CED's first proposal would "prohibit national party committees from soliciting, receiving, and spending any contributions not subject to the limitations and public disclosure requirements of federal law." That's pathetically easy to get around, since it doesn't cover state parties: a minute after that proposal became law, new offices in Washington would open for consortiums of state parties. Putting the "reform" label on steps that won't work only reduces public confidence.

Their "even more radical reform: public financing of congressional campaigns" made the funding conditional on candidates' capping their spending in House races at $500,000—a limit so low that it will kill challenges. Successful GOP challengers in 1998 spent a median of $822,511, and successful Democratic challengers spent $1,225,763; other recent cycles are similar. Surely Judis doesn't mean to applaud the CED's inviting the incumbents to set limits that only protect them from competition?

ROY A. SCHOTLAND
Professor of Law
Georgetown University Law Center
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITORS:
There is little doubt that the basic premise of John B. Judis's article is correct—that the once-disinterested elites, who were able to put the national interest above parochial ones, have largely disappeared. The primary reason for this, according to the author, was the threat posed by the New Left in the 1960s, which provoked the business community to adopt a narrower, more self-interested focus.

However, there is another element that played an important role in all of this: the emergence and eventual predominance of investor capitalism, epitomized by takeovers and downsizings. Under investor capitalism, the task of the corporate executive is to constantly increase short-term shareholder value; otherwise, he loses his job. To help ensure that shareholder value would increase, stock options were offered to corporate officials, so that



if shareholders were rewarded, CEOs would also reap immediate and substantial benefits. In such a world, it should not be surprising that the corporate elite has little interest in pursuing the greater good.

WILLIAM BEAVER
Department of Social Science
Robert Morris College
Coraopolis, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITORS:
John B. Judis attacks as "patently false" the statement in our radio ads that "thousands of scientists agree that there's no solid evidence of a global warming problem." In his view, this statement is not even based on "biased or inaccurate scientific research"; instead, he characterizes it as "purely a statement of business self-interest."

In fact, it's Judis's charge that is patently false. The Global Warming Petition Project has collected more than 17,000 signatures from American scientists who agree that there "is no convincing scientific evidence" that human activities will cause either catastrophic heating or climate disruption. The petition has its own website (*www.oism.org/pproject*) and has received widespread press coverage. Had Judis bothered to contact us, let alone investigate our statement, he would easily have discovered this.

SAM KAZMAN
General Counsel
Competitive Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

JOHN B. JUDIS REPLIES:
I wonder how many other radio listeners made the same mistake I did. I understood CEI's ad saying that thousands of

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scientists doubted there was a "global warming problem" to mean that thousands thought there was no global warming, a claim that *is* "patently false." (The grammar is similar to that of a city police chief saying he doubts there is a hard-drug problem. We assume he means that there are not many hard drugs around, not that they are around but not dangerous.) I was surprised to learn of the petition to which Sam Kazman refers, and I acknowledge that, by this interpretation of the ad, it was not "patently false." The petition takes, however, a more complicated and less ambiguous position than the ad. It doesn't dispute the existence of global warming, only the "catastrophic" effects of "increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide," caused by humans. The ad may not have been patently false, but it was misleading.

Twisting in the wind

TO THE EDITORS:

Thomas Huxley once wrote about the tragedy of a fact killing a theory. It is clear that, in her article "Weather Vain" (March 27), Michelle Cottle had a theory—that during the GOP primary Bill Bennett constantly sought to ingratiate himself with the Republican candidate who was "hot"—and she wasn't going to let the facts get in her way. The problem is that Cottle's sins of omission and selective use of quotes reveal her article to be the kind of shoddy, snide journalism that too often finds its way into THE NEW REPUBLIC.

First, the idea that Bennett tried to cozy up to the Bush campaign whenever the Texas governor was the front-runner dissolves if you consider that in August 1999—when George W. Bush was the prohibitive favorite to win the GOP nomination—Bennett wrote a critical *Wall Street Journal* piece about Bush's refusal to respond to inquiries about his past cocaine use. If Bennett was trying to gain favor with the front-runner, that was surely not the way to go about it. Then, on the September 28 "Larry King Live" program—when Arizona Senator John McCain was still very low in the polls and Bush was still flying high—Bennett praised McCain for his strong statements against Pat Buchanan and criticized Bush for not making similar ones.

Second, appearing on CNN's "Inside Politics" on January 17, Bennett criticized both Bush and McCain for not taking a stand against the flying of the Confederate flag over the South Carolina state capitol.

Third, on February 12—when McCain was still basking in the glow of his landslide victory in the New Hampshire primary—Bennett said this to *The Washington Post* about the McCain ad comparing Bush to President Clinton: "It's not right. It was about as low-road as you can get. It diminishes particularly the man who says, 'I'm not going to be negative.'" On a February 27 appearance on "Face the Nation"—after McCain had won the Arizona and Michigan primaries—Bennett criticized the McCain campaign for not coming clean regarding their involvement in paying for Michigan ads critical of Bush. In Bennett's words, "If you call yourself the Straight Talk Express, you'd better talk straight.... Now, you know, if [McCain's] going to be the shoot-from-the-hip, candid guy... then he's got to clear it up."

Moreover, Cottle implies that Bennett had only praise for the Arizona senator's speech criticizing Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and that only after the Arizona senator's losses in the Virginia and Washington state primaries a day later did he say anything critical about the McCain speech. But Bennett did explicitly criticize McCain's speech on the TV appearance Cottle cites, saying that the comparison of Robertson and Falwell with Louis Farrakhan and Al Sharpton was "not right." Cottle also seems dumbfounded that Bennett would react strongly to McCain's comments, the day after his Virginia Beach speech, that Robertson and Falwell are an "evil influence" and "forces of evil." This demonstrates that Cottle has such a deep prejudice against conservative Christians that she doesn't quite see the problem with literally demonizing them.

A fair reading of the record demonstrates, first, that Bennett has been remarkably candid throughout the campaign and has done plenty to upset whoever was the front-runner. And, second, that Cottle is a lousy reporter. Or biased. Or both.

PETER WEHNER
Executive Director for Policy
Empower America
Washington, D.C.

MICHELLE COTTLE REPLIES:

I agree that it's an easy matter to cherry-pick quotes, but I disagree as to who has done so in this case. I too reviewed the transcripts from Bill Bennett's myriad TV appearances, and I fully appreciate how carefully Bennett navigated the demilitarized zone between the McCain and Bush camps. After all, it wouldn't have been much of a "high-wire act" if Bennett had, in each appearance, offered only praise for the candidate du jour and criticism for the guy in trouble. Instead, he consistently offered at least a smattering of each for both men. Nonetheless, the ratio of positive to negative remarks and the harshness (or mildness) of his criticism clearly vacillated in the final months of the primary season (the only period my article covers).

continued on page 45

The Oil Crisis. Stagflation. And Bad Hair.

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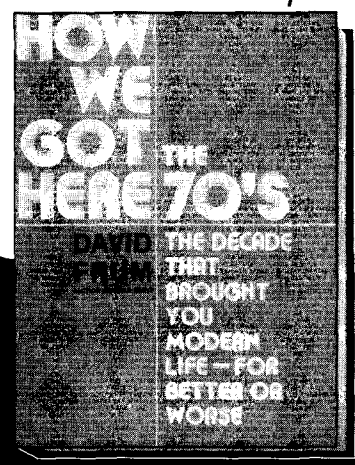

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FROM WASHINGTON

Qualified

SINCE THE PRESIDENTIAL campaign began last fall, conventional wisdom about Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush has ricocheted wildly. In November, Bush was charismatic, emphatic, and accomplished. By March, he was intolerant and dumb. In autumn, Gore was cynical, wooden, and emotionally autistic. By spring, he was cynical, tough, and a political genius. And now, after Gore's Elián González pander and Bush's return to compassion, conventional wisdom has flipped once again. All of which raises the kind of elementary question you'd think the media would ask, but they don't: What makes a good president, anyway?

A survey of the eleven chief executives from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Bill Clinton suggests that six qualities matter. And a preliminary assessment of Bush and Gore suggests that the two have different strengths and different weaknesses and, at this point, look like they'd be roughly equivalent overall.

Mastery of the bully pulpit. For a job that places a huge premium on public teaching and preaching, the recent presidents have been surprisingly poor public communicators, and Gore and Bush would comfortably continue that tradition. The great exceptions were FDR, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan. (As in much else, Clinton's performance is uneven, alternating between rhetorical home runs and sheer bombast.) But there's hope for W. and Al: FDR, JFK, and Reagan weren't always eloquent; they learned it. In 1910, when Eleanor Roosevelt first heard her husband give a speech, she was taken aback by his long pauses and slow delivery. "I was worried for fear that he would never go on," she recalled. When Kennedy first entered politics, his public presentations were halting and diffident. His oratorical panache emerged only during his years in the Senate. And, for all of Reagan's experience as a radio announcer and movie actor, he did not acquire his polished podium manner until the 1950s, the better part of which he spent on the corporate speaking circuit.

Organizational capacity. The modern president with the richest organizational experience was the man who managed D-Day: Dwight Eisenhower. "I know of only one way in which you can be sure you have done your best to make a wise decision," the former supreme commander once remarked. "That is to get all of the [responsible policymakers] with their different viewpoints in front of you and listen to them debate." Eisenhower's advice could have helped his successor avoid the Bay of Pigs. In the lead-up to that fiasco, skeptics within the Kennedy administration were silenced and Kennedy aides with relevant viewpoints were not consulted. In short, it was a textbook illustration of organizational *in*capacity.

Political skill. Those who doubt that presidents must be skilled political operators need only remember Jimmy Carter, who couldn't build productive relationships with key policymakers in Washington or abroad and racked up a catalogue of avoidable errors as a result. Lyndon Johnson represents the opposite pole. Within hours after Kennedy's assassination, LBJ had begun to muster backing for the most extensive domestic policy agenda since FDR's first 100 days. Yet, despite Johnson's political virtuosity, he led America into the disaster that was the Vietnam War.

Which brings us to *policy vision.* Organizational skill is of little use if you're pursuing unrealistic or contradictory goals. Three modern presidents stand out for the explicitness of their policies: Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, and Reagan. Chief executives with clear programs are better able to set the terms of political debate. Presidents who lack a clear plan tend to drift, introducing programs that cancel one another out and self-destruct. Contrast Eisenhower and Johnson on Vietnam. In 1954, when the French faced defeat in Indochina, Eisenhower ruled out the use of U.S. troops, declaring that the jungles of Southeast Asia would "absorb our divisions by the dozens." In 1965, Johnson embarked on an open-ended ground war in Vietnam, never pausing to establish precise objectives or to assess the likely duration and demands of the venture. Three years later, Vietnam had engulfed half a million American troops, and the Johnson presidency was on the rocks.

Cognitive qualities. Carter had an engineer's tendency to reduce issues to their component parts, an approach that served him well in the 1978 Camp David negotiations but didn't provide his administration with a sense of direction. Carter's obsessive attention to detail contrasts with the highly strategic intelligence of a chief executive who, thanks to his failings in other regards, will never grace Mount Rushmore: Nixon. Two years before entering the White House, Nixon decided to move the United States beyond its military involvement in Southeast Asia and to establish a balance of power with the Soviet Union and an accommodation with China. By the final year of his first term, Nixon had done so. He succeeded because he was smart in the right way: he saw the big picture.

Emotional intelligence. A president must be able to manage his (or, someday, her) feelings constructively rather than allowing them to dominate him and undermine his performance. Three modern presidents were truly free of distracting emotional perturbations: Eisenhower, Gerald Ford, and George Bush. Four were marked by emotional undercurrents that were troubling but didn't significantly undermine their effectiveness: FDR, Harry Truman, Kennedy, and Reagan. Then there are LBJ, Nixon, Carter, and Clinton. The Vesuvian LBJ inhibited free debate in his councils. Nixon revealed an anger and suspiciousness of Shakespearean proportions. Carter had a personal rigidity that prevented key compromises with political players at home and abroad. Clinton's indiscretion in the Monica Lewinsky case is emblematic of a larger lack of self-discipline that has marked his presidency. All four had impressive intellects, but they were the opposite of FDR, who, in the characterization of Oliver Wendell Holmes, had a second-class mind and a first-class temperament. LBJ and Nixon presided over two of the most unhappy developments of twentieth-century America: Vietnam and Watergate. Carter was a national pariah by the end of his first term, and Clinton got impeached.

What about George W. Bush and Al Gore? Neither is rhetorically gifted, and each probably has the skill and flexibility to be reasonably effective in Washington and abroad. As a governor, Bush has more organizational experience. Gore has revealed more of a policy vision, although it is not clear whether there is a larger architecture to his policies. Neither was a top student, but Gore comes across as sharper. Finally, neither looks like an emotional time bomb, but Bush has shown a worrisome querulousness and irritability. Of course, it is early for such judgments, but here's a preliminary assessment: Both would make decent presidents suitable for relatively painless times, but not great ones who could provide creative leadership during a real crisis.

FRED GREENSTEIN

FRED GREENSTEIN is professor of politics at Princeton University and author of *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from Roosevelt to Clinton* (Free Press).

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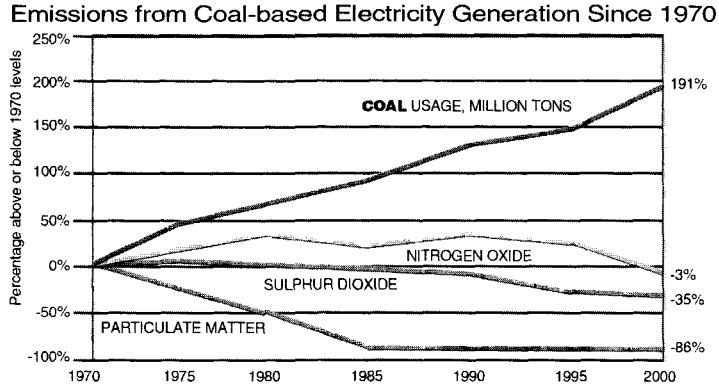

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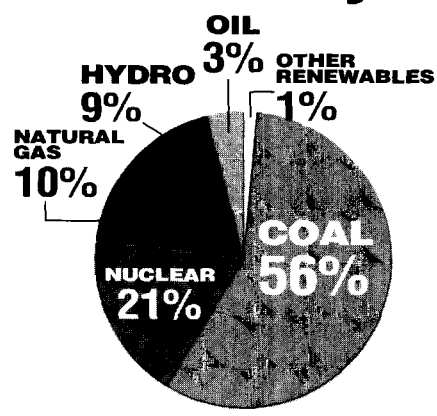

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Mute

"AFRICA DOES MATTER to the United States," said President Clinton in February at the much-hyped National Summit on Africa. "In this world, we can be indifferent, or we can make a difference."

Hot air. How else to describe those lovely phrases in light of the Clinton administration's nonresponse to this month's events in Zimbabwe? A corrupt and brutal thug, faced with a popular uprising by his long-suffering people, dispatches his cronies to terrorize the black opposition and drive white farmers from their land. Zimbabwe, once an African success story, nosedives toward economic and social collapse—potentially dragging its fragile neighbors down with it. And what do Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and U.N. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke—who have sworn again and again that Africa is an American priority—say? Nothing at all.

Their justification: Britain can handle it. As White House spokesman Joe Lockhart put it, "Prime Minister Blair ... is obviously taking a leadership role in condemning what is going on in Zimbabwe." That's not good enough. First, many black Zimbabweans do not see Britain, their former colonial power, as an honest broker. This is particularly important because Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is desperately fanning anti-colonial and racial hostilities to obscure Zimbabwe's real problem: him. Second, London has historically taken a softer line than the United States toward African dictatorships, especially in countries with significant ex-British-settler populations, like Kenya and Zimbabwe.

And, sure enough, Britain has, in turn, subcontracted its Zimbabwe policy to a country even more prone to appeasement: South Africa. President Thabo Mbeki won't condemn Mugabe, because black South Africans have their own resentments against white farmers—who, as in Zimbabwe, control a disproportionate share of fertile land. The British made much of an April 21 Victoria Falls summit at which Mbeki and other regional leaders were supposed to pressure Mugabe. Instead, they fêted him as a champion of the rule of the law. Three days later, a mob of 150 people invaded a white-owned farm and tried to burn its black workers alive.

So what should Clinton say? First, that Zimbabwe genuinely does need land reform. It is morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable for Zimbabwe's whites, who comprise less than one percent of the country's population, to own one-third of the arable land. Under the right conditions, America should commit real money to buy land for Zimbabwe's landless blacks and to give them the tools to develop it. But the right conditions, Clinton should say, mean someone other than Mugabe controlling the process. For Mbeki and some leftists in the West to blame Zimbabwe's maldistribution of land on Britain and the International Monetary Fund is absurd. Every time anyone has given Mugabe money for land redistribution, the land has gone to his political cronies. Until Zimbabwe's government reforms itself, only a fool would lend more.

Zimbabwe is scheduled to hold elections in May. If they are fair, the broad-based Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) will probably win control of parliament—offering a desperately needed check on Mugabe's power and perhaps paving the way for a return to true democracy. By speaking up about Zimbabwe, Clinton can ensure that those elections take place in the glare of the world spotlight. If they are truly free and fair, America should open talks with Mugabe's government and the MDC to see whether it is possible to devise a program for land reform that is not controlled by the president's corrupt henchmen. If the elections are rigged, Clinton (not Jamie Rubin, not Joe Lockhart) should publicly condemn them. He should withdraw America's diplomats and call on South Africa to cut off Zimbabwe's supply of electricity, which Mugabe's government has not been paying for anyway.

Zimbabwe's situation is not hopeless. By African standards, the country still has a solid infrastructure and an educated people. Its neighbors—South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia—represent the continent's strongest economies and could help pull Zimbabwe along. Zimbabwe's people are not as racially divided as their president would like the world to believe: most blacks blame Mugabe, not the white farmers, for the lack of land reform. And, ironically, Mugabe's recent attacks have brought many blacks and whites together under the auspices of the MDC.

Zimbabwe's situation is not hopeless—yet. But if its government does not soon change, white farmers will leave en masse, decimating the economy for years to come. And the opposition may turn violent, dimming hopes of a peaceful transition. The Clinton administration can no longer afford to stand on the sidelines. Not, that is, if it still thinks Africa matters. ■

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NOTEBOOK

THE PARENT TRAP: Of all the tortured logic in conservatives' attacks on the Clinton administration for reuniting Elián González with his father, none has been more tortured than that of parents' rights advocates. After all, if you support parents' rights, shouldn't you support Juan Miguel González's right to custody of his son? It's not the kind of issue you can have both ways, right? Not according to the Gary Bauer-founded Family Research Council (FRC). The FRC, according to its mission statement, "exists to reaffirm and promote ... the traditional family unit and the Judeo-Christian value system upon which it is built." Just this January, the FRC stridently championed the rights of biological parents in a Supreme Court case on whether grandparents have the right to visit their grandchildren over parental objections. "In the age of splintered families," the FRC proclaimed in a statement about the case, "the government needs to uphold the family unit, not break it down.... [G]randparents and other third parties can play an important role in the life of a child, but a child's parents should have the final word...." Looks like "third parties" doesn't include great-uncles. On April 24, the FRC issued a statement condemning "Janet Reno's pre-dawn assault" on the "modest family home in Miami's Little Havana" that reunited Elián with his father. So has the FRC abandoned parents' rights for naked partisanship? Of course not. "Parental rights have been grossly abused during the Clinton years," the FRC declared in its denunciation of the raid. "Why now the tender concern?" So let's get this straight. Because those rights have been abused in the past, the FRC now wants them abused further. Makes sense to us.

CARBON-COPY POLICY: At the June 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, the nations of the European Union vowed dramatic, immediate cuts in greenhouse gases and denounced America's refusal to make the same pledge. Alas, the EU nations never followed through. Flash forward five years to the 1997 Kyoto conference, where the EU countries once again endlessly criticized the United States as an impediment to reducing greenhouse gases and promised swift, decisive action of their own. Well, more than two years have passed since Kyoto, and, yes, the United States has still not ratified the treaty signed there. But neither have any of the EU nations—not even greener-than-thou Denmark. And now EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström has declared that Europe won't ratify the treaty unless the United States makes its greenhouse-gas cuts at home, not overseas via something called "carbon trading." Under carbon trading, each country is allowed to produce a certain amount of carbon emissions, but a country is permitted to exceed its allotted emissions if it pays another country to reduce its emissions accordingly. Virtually every economist who has looked at the global warming question has concluded that this is the cheapest, fastest way to cut greenhouse gases. The goal of greenhouse reform, after all, is to cut *global* emissions—the sky doesn't care which nation the carbon comes from. But the Europeans, by insisting that the Kyoto treaty be clarified to prevent carbon trading, apparently do. Perhaps this is because European economic ministers realize that such a rule would harm the United States, which is coal-dependent, more than it would hurt the EU, whose electricity generation is based on low-carbon natural gas. Or maybe, just maybe, the EU is simply setting up another excuse for its own inaction. It wouldn't be the first time.

CONFINED STATE:

State convicts find life easier in Virginia

—*Waterbury Republican-American*, January 6

Life tougher for inmates from state sent to Va.

—*New Haven Register*, January 7

(Thanks to Steven Macoy of Bethel, Connecticut.)

"MAKE IT SO," PINCH SAYS OF STORY: The April 20 edition of *The New York Times* allocated mere news briefs to the truce in Sudan and the hostage deaths in the Philippines. But the *Times* needed to save space. Otherwise, how would it have had room for an entire boxed-for-attention story on the appointment of Alex S. Jones to head the press-watching Shorenstein Center at Harvard University? The unsigned, no-dateline account reads like a press release and even includes the full, formal wording of Jones's previous title, a detail *Times* reports almost always skip for lesser appointments such as, say, Cabinet secretaries. (We learn that Jones was previously the "Eugene C. Patterson Professor of the Practice of Journalism" at Duke University—not of journalism, mind you, but of the "Practice of Journalism.") Don't get us wrong—the Shorenstein Center is a nice enough place, but it's not exactly a leading institution of the Western world. So why this extraordinary treatment for a mere faculty appointment? Maybe because Jones is coauthor of a just-published book, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times*, that is worshipful in general—"To the credit of *The New York Times*," Jones has said, "the idea of remaining and keeping true to the values of *The New York Times* is an obsession of the institution"—and especially solicitous toward Arthur ("Pinch") Sulzberger Jr., the paper's publisher. On the issue about which Arthur Jr. is considered most sensitive, *The Trust* goes out of its way to argue that Pinch obtained his position based on merit—the fact that his father held the job and his family owned the majority share of the company's stock being irrelevant. Pinch, of course, is the same person who has said that he got to where he is by being a bold risk-taker—just like Captain Picard on "Star Trek"! The transparency of all this would be shameful if it weren't so

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comic. At least we know what the Shorenstein Center wanted from its new director: someone who knows the right posture to assume when dealing with the *Times*.

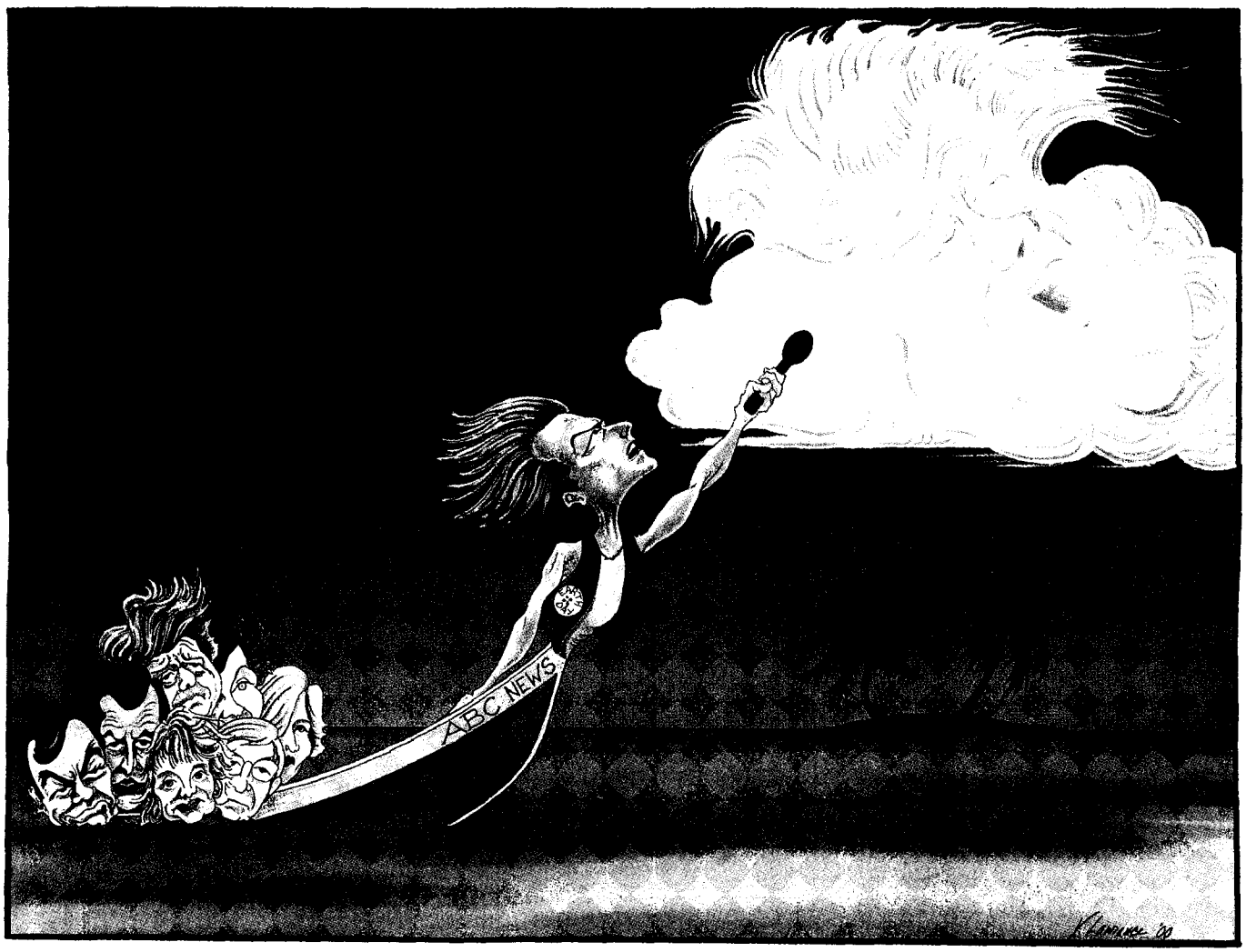
THIS JUST IN:

Violence against women seen as health issue

—*The Providence Journal*, January 21
(Thanks to W. Scott Axford of Providence, Rhode Island.)

THE MORE YOU KNOW: "The more Americans know about the world, the more likely they are to favor diplomacy over punitive sanctions in dealing with troublesome foreign countries, a poll has found," an article in the April 23 *New York Times* reports. The article goes on to explain that the poll in question was the handiwork of "First International Resources, a business consulting group, and the polling organization Penn, Schoen & Berland." And who are some of First International Resources's clients, since the *Times* didn't bother to say? A bunch of global Fortune 500 companies, including some with trade interests in—surprise, surprise—countries against which the United States currently imposes economic sanctions, like Iran. And what does First International Resources do for these clients, since the *Times* also failed to mention that? Well, among other things, as the consulting group states on its website, "We enlist public opinion as additional support for our clients in corporate and governmental disputes"; in other words, the firm commissions polls to help its clients when the government impairs their bottom lines. Now, maybe it's true that the more Americans know about the world, the less likely they are to support sanctions (although it's hard to say, since First International Resources refuses to release the questions used in its survey). But one thing's certain: The more Americans know about polls—and the motives of those who commission them—the more likely they are to take their findings with a grain of salt. Too bad they didn't learn anything about those motivations from *The New York Times*. ■

VINT'S WEEK



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New York Dispatch

Forum Over Function

By FRANKLIN FOER

LAST TUESDAY MORNING, viewers of Fox News were treated to a curious sight. Rather than the usual diet of bombastic right-wing pundits and leggy blond anchorwomen, they witnessed a crinkly 69-year-old man hunched over a notepad. With a graduate student's fervor, he listened intently as Henry Kissinger riffed about American hegemony. When an observation popped into his mind, he related it to the young woman sitting at his side. Indeed, TV viewers might have mistaken him for a thoughtful man—which was exactly the point.

The man was Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox and the *New York Post.* He was in New York hosting Global Forum 2000, a fancy confab of deep thinkers and deep pockets. For this Davos on the Hudson, Murdoch scored an A-list panel—Robert Rubin, Colin Powell, Newt Gingrich, Mikhail Gorbachev—and an A-list crowd: Peter Jennings, Mort Zuckerman, Georgette Mosbacher, and Michael Bolton. Murdoch chose a grand, grave topic: America's role in the world. His guests spoke in grand, grave tones, and the event felt effortlessly highbrow.

At least, that's how it was supposed to feel. Actually, it felt like a pseudo-event slickly produced for mass consumption. Panelists entered the room to videos with frenetic graphics and loud sound effects suspiciously similar to those used to introduce players on Fox's NFL broadcasts. While the panelists awaited their turn on the dais, they were interviewed by Fox talk-show hosts Brit Hume and Paula Zahn on specially constructed sets. Indeed, the confab highlighted Murdoch's tragedy: he really, really wants to be serious. But he just can't bring himself to do it.

Murdoch has made a career of purveying vulgarity—from his British tabloids, with their page-three girls, to Fox, which introduced America to such edification as "Studs," "Cops," and "Melrose Place." And in his early days, at least, particularly when he was making untold fortunes in his native Australia, Murdoch charmingly fended off charges of coarseness, scoffing at pompous elites and displaying a roguish populism.

But that insouciance has faded with age. And for some time now Murdoch has made a kind of second career of fighting his reputation as the world's schlockmeister general. In 1981, he took his first stab at respectability, buying the *Times* of London. In the 1990s, he took his redemption campaign to America, launching *The Weekly Standard* and offering presidential candidates free airtime on the Fox News Channel. Even the *New York Post* has recently shifted its attention away from its down-market reader base to the East Side set, providing indispensable columns on media, markets, and Silicon Alley.

In the end, though, Murdoch's elite institutions don't bring him up; he brings them down. Londoners complain that, under his ownership, the *Times* has become shrill and sensationalist, no longer the grand institution it once was. When he bought HarperCollins, a few editors muttered that he dumbed it down. He's even been accused of junking up baseball, which he shows on Fox, by putting microphones on the

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field and cluttering broadcasts of the pastoral pastime with glitzy, mindless graphics.

So last week Murdoch took his campaign to new heights: He built his own personal Council on Foreign Relations. But Global Forum 2000 was about as reserved and austere as a mafia wedding. Lime-green lights flooded the room's massive Ionic columns. A 40-foot, gold-tone globe was imported as the centerpiece. And union labor spent four days constructing an elaborate amphitheater for the four-hour event. All told, it cost about $1 million.

No one seemed to know quite what they were doing there. The audience at the Global Forum was staged, packed with employees from Murdoch's umbrella company, News Corp. Murdoch himself sat surrounded by attentive staff from his publicists' office. And Kissinger, who wrangled many of the panelists for the event, did so only for a hefty fee. (News Corp would neither confirm nor deny this.) At a post-panel press conference, reporters sat blankly for an embarrassing minute before they could think of any questions to pose.

Of the high-powered officials in attendance, only the European and Japanese politicians, who politely complained about American hegemony and cultural imperialism, had a real point to make. And their point was unwittingly underscored when they received gift bags containing *Witness to America*, a triumphalist coffee-table book, and copies of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*.

Finally, Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey, one of the panelists, spoke the thoughts of most observers in the room when, after thanking Kissinger for the invite, he wondered aloud, "I am still trying to answer the question why?" He could have found his answer by casting a quick glance at Murdoch, who was leaning back in his chair, tugging on his chin, and grinning. ■

Hooray for those vacuous celebrities.

Green With Envy

By Benjamin Soskis

There was a lot of talk about alternative energy at last Saturday's EarthFair 2000, the giant thirtieth-anniversary celebration of Earth Day held on the Mall. The event's organizers boasted about the biodiesel fuel and solar microturbines that ran the light and sound system for the massive stage. Across the Mall, huge tents held exhibits on wind, solar, and geothermal power.

But the real display of alternative energy came when scores of young girls, lingering before solar panels and models of windmills, realized that Leonardo DiCaprio, the event's national chairman, was about to take the stage. First, turbine-like, they began to hum with whispers of Leo's imminent appearance. Then hundreds of them streamed out of the tents—whose flaps practically vibrated with prepubescent ardor—and rushed toward the stage. Indeed, when DiCaprio stepped up to the podium, the pitter-patter of those adolescent hearts could have powered all of Washington, D.C.

And they went on pattering throughout the day. As Vice President Al Gore, who followed DiCaprio on the program, began speaking about global warming and his book *Earth in the Balance*, the crowd let out a series of high-pitched screams. From my vantage point (or lack thereof) in the press tent, it seemed odd that the crowd would get so worked up over Gore's green-friendly tome. But then I understood the reason for the screams: A roving horde of teens, having spotted DiCaprio leaving the stage area, was rushing past the press tent, hoping to catch a final glimpse of the star before he left for the day.

Gore shrugged off the distraction, but others weren't so forgiving. One person in the crowd, frustrated with the hijacking of the event by celebrities, waved a sign reading SAVE THE EARTH—NOT LEO'S CAREER. And then there was Winona LaDuke, the American Indian activist whom Ralph Nader recently tapped as his number two on the Green Party's presidential ticket. LaDuke was scheduled to speak immediately before Third Eye Blind, a rock band just a few orders of magnitude dimmer than Leo in the teen-idol constellation, performed.

Shortly before LaDuke took the podium, roadies for Third Eye Blind wheeled a large drum kit on stage, and the thicket of adolescent girls at the front of the crowd began to stir in anticipation. They quieted a bit at the sight of LaDuke—a striking presence with her dark hair and ceremonial beads—who launched into an eloquent, scathing attack on the government's shameful treatment of American Indians. But, when the roadies began to test the band's guitars, the girls couldn't quite suppress their squeals. LaDuke did not approve. She cast a few nasty looks in the stagehands' direction as she continued to berate the white man's profligacy. Finally, she exploded, "Can you guys cut it out for one minute?!"

LaDuke's outburst echoed deeper grumbling among environmental activists over Earth Day's mainstreaming. It has become, they complain, a corporate-sponsored, celebrity-obsessed extravaganza settling benignly into the Mother's/Secretaries'/Presidents' Day pantheon. While Tim Hermach of the Native Forest Council conceded that there are many "intelligent, committed celebrities"—he mentioned Ted Danson in particular—he griped about others whose unserious demeanor teaches young kids "that the environment is a joke." And when a grinning Tom Arnold ambled up to the EarthFair podium and announced, "I'm running on natural gas," it was hard not to sympathize.

Hard, but not impossible. Actually, it was the breezy celebrities, more than the earnest activists, who made EarthFair 2000 a success. First, there's the obvious fact that half a million people would never have congregated on the Mall on a drizzly Saturday had the heartthrobs not been there. "I

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wouldn't have gotten out of bed today if it wasn't for Leo," confessed Chessie Cornett, a freshman at Howard Community College in Maryland. Not long after Leo gave his five-minute speech, however, Cornett wandered over to the educational displays. Who knows if she gleaned anything from them, but at least she was looking.

But DiCaprio's real accomplishment wasn't his effect on D.C.'s love-struck teens. It was his effect on the city's anti-environmentalist conservatives, who lustily denounced the hypocrisy of the celebrity attendees, thereby unwittingly endorsing some of environmentalism's premises. Representatives from the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a libertarian think tank, hoisted a placard reading LEO, CAN I BORROW YOUR TAHOE?—a reference to the star's gas-guzzling sport-utility vehicle. Glenn Kelly, executive chairman of the pro-business Global Climate Coalition, chastised DiCaprio in *The Washington Post* for being "a known environmental offender," referring to the fact that during the filming of *The Beach*, in which DiCaprio starred, parts of a national park in Thailand were destroyed. And Marc Morano, a reporter for the conservative TV newsmagazine "American Investigator," spent much of EarthFair 2000 in the VIP parking lot. There, he filmed celebrities getting in and out of various gas-guzzlers—an obvious no-no for global warming activists. Clint Black and Donna Mills arrived in minivans, he told me gleefully, and "Leonardo DiCaprio pulled up in a brand-new, shiny overstretched limousine, three of them showed up, [he] gets out with his entourage of people."

The irony, of course, is that without the celebrity targets, the right would never have shown such solicitousness for Thai beaches or admitted the immorality of driving an SUV. Just as the thought of seeing DiCaprio lured teenage girls to exhibits on solar power, the thought of undermining him led pro-business groups to tacitly concede some environmental concerns. Maybe there really is something to this "king of the world" stuff, after all. ■

Why public science can't really be public.

Wrong Map

By SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

IN EARLY APRIL, a private corporation named Celera announced it was about to pull off the most important scientific breakthrough in a decade: a detailed map of the human genome. But not everyone was happy about this news. Celera had been locked in a race with the Human Genome Project, a government initiative that soaked up almost $1 billion in public money trying to do the same thing. Now the project's backers in Congress want to know why it's finishing second.

The simple answer is that the project lost one of its best scientists to the private sector. In 1995, a man named J. Craig Venter developed a new technique for gene sequencing called the "shotgun" method. Folks at the genome project were skeptical of his technique, which they considered less precise, so Venter left to start a nonprofit corporation. After a blitzkrieg of scientific publications proved that Venter's technique worked, he merged his nonprofit with a for-profit giant, Perkin-Elmer Corporation, and created Celera. Its mandate: Beat the feds, sequence the entire human genome, secure patents for genes with commercial applications, and reap massive profits—all of which it is about to do.

Members of Congress are vowing not to let this happen again. And one idea is gaining particular currency: abolishing gene patenting altogether, thus eliminating the incentive for scientists to piggyback on government research and then leave for the private sector. After all, Celera's scientists may have been talented and creative, but they clearly benefited from sequencing technology developed in federally funded labs. Venter's own ideas about shotgun sequencing were conceived within laboratories funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Why not pull the plug on gene patents and thus eliminate the private-sector windfalls that make top scientists stiff Uncle Sam?

Because eliminating the profit motive might kill the entire biotech industry. There's a better solution, and it's based on an old principle: If you can't beat them, join them. Right now, the government is a de facto incubator for private companies like Celera. Why not admit it and make the private investors start paying their share of the basic research whose benefits they eventually reap?

THE RIGHT TO patent genes was established a decade ago, when the Supreme Court recognized a patent claim by a California-based company named Amgen. The patented gene, called EPO, helps create a medical product that coaxes blood to grow, thus making it a key drug for patients with anemia. Since that ruling, biologists working in both federal and private labs have been trying to patent more genes like Amgen's blood-growing cash cow. Celera, according to Venter, hopes to focus on "100 to 300 targets from among the thousands of potential targets" in the human genetic sequence and then characterize them in detail.

If Congress undid the Supreme Court's decision and passed a law outlawing gene patenting, it might prevent scientists like Venter from jumping to the private sector. And the House Committee on Science has been holding hearings to consider doing exactly that. But private-sector researchers argue that banning gene patents would kill corporations' incentive to invest in research. And they are probably right. Even Bernadine Healy, while she was director of the NIH, admitted, "Patents are important to commercialization in the biomedical field because they provide the exclusivity that encourages industry to invest the resources necessary to bring an invention from the discovery stage through the stages of development, clinical trials, and regulatory approvals, and ultimately into commercial production."

SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE *is completing his studies at Harvard Medical School.*

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So some in Congress are pushing another idea: Instead of banning gene patents, write stricter contracts between researchers and the government. Under the Bayh-Dole Act, federally funded researchers (in collaboration with their host institutions, such as universities or nonprofits) can retain the titles to their own discoveries. To prevent federally funded researchers from exporting their work into the private sector, perhaps all that's needed is a modified act that would let the government retain partial control on research performed with public funds.

But here, too, the cure might be worse than the disease. Repealing Bayh-Dole would make host institutions that receive federal money unappealing places to work. Fortune hunters—the kind who patent genes—would be even more likely to leave for private industry, where the financial rewards would be easily and directly available to them. The institutions that receive federal funding would be left with fewer and less-talented researchers to draw upon.

A THIRD STRATEGY makes more sense. The Human Genome Project should have spent a smaller amount, perhaps a few million dollars, to let scientists like Venter test new techniques and streamline production. When these sequencing efforts finally matured, the NIH should have pushed the projects out of its nurseries and let their inventors hunt for private investors to finance their expansion and further development. Scientists like Venter would still have left the NIH. But they would have been forced to do so early on, *before* the government pumped in millions of public dollars.

Such a system would benefit not only scientists eager to jump to the private sector but also those who wished to stay in the government's employ. One of the problems with the genome project was that most of its scientists were not like Venter. They were academics primarily interested in cutting-edge science; they preferred precision to speed and scientific advance to commercial application. Having them compete with the private sector on a project like mapping the genome—which, after the technique had been settled upon, devolved into a relatively tedious task—was a bad idea from the start. In an incubator system, these scientists could continue to do what they do best: cutting-edge science that is intellectually important but not necessarily financially rewarding.

Incubator models are not perfect. Encouraging the exodus of scientists into private-sector biotechnology will mean fewer patents—and less money—for the NIH. But, as small-scale projects are exported into private industry, the NIH will save the massive up-front expenses incurred during their expansion and thus avoid embarrassing debacles like the genome project. And spawning a cadre of competing scientists would also ensure that a single company doesn't run off with all the patents—which is what Celera is now in a position to do. With the obvious exception of projects involving national security, the government should keep its money for brilliant but smaller ideas that will never turn a profit. There's nothing wrong with scientists becoming millionaires. But the public shouldn't have to pay for it. ■

Why the right needs Elián.

There They Go Again

By RYAN LIZZA

TIRED OF "all Elián, all the time"? Here's some bad news: it's not going away. It's not just that congressional Republicans are holding hearings on the raid this week. The reason is deeper. The lunatic right is officially ushering the INS's raid into its pantheon of government outrages—first there was Ruby Ridge, then there was Waco.... Within minutes of Elián González's seizure, long-dormant anti-Clinton websites like *www.FreeRepublic.com* lit up with rants about the government's "Commie-stormtroop-bastards." "It is time for us to riot," wrote someone called RaceBannon. "The End of America? YES, I think so," a Tennessee militiaman posted to one newsgroup. Clinton scandalmonger Larry Klayman invited Elián's Miami relatives to a court hearing on his lawsuit to uncover the "truth behind Reno's raid." And former Watergate conspirator and current Christian-right icon Chuck Colson has been fulminating on his radio show about "flak-jacketed marshals invading homes in the middle of the night."

Why Elián? Because paranoid libertarianism needs fresh outrages to confirm its demented worldview, and the old favorites were wearing thin. Congress's Ruby Ridge hearings went nowhere. Waco has had more staying power, but the latest evidence suggests that former Senator John Danforth's commission, which is investigating the debacle, will soon prove false key conspiracy-theorist claims—for instance, that the government fired on the Branch Davidians. Even the stories of IRS vendettas against taxpayers are proving all smoke and no fire. But the Elián affair, if viewed from a sufficiently cocked angle, can be made to reaffirm all the big lessons about Amerika and the New World Order.

First, there is the perceived trampling of local authority (as represented by Miami's courts and local elected officials) by the federal government (as represented by Janet Reno). "The fact that [the local law enforcement personnel] took orders from the feds rather than [from] the local officials is really quite chilling," notes longtime fringe conservative and Constitution Party presidential candidate Howard Phillips, who is already using the Miami raid in his fund-raising appeals.

Also confirmed in Miami was the assumption that the government never bargains in good faith. Waco buffs insist the FBI stormed David Koresh's compound just when a breakthrough in negotiations was imminent. Similarly, the hard right now insists that Reno never really wanted a deal on Elián. (Never mind the months of negotiations and the countless deadlines she let pass.) "Always remember the enemy was talking and 'negotiating' at the time of the assault at Miami and at Waco," advises a member of Indiana's

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Greene County Militia in an e-mail dispatch devoted to ways to prevent a Miami-style raid of your own home. (In case you're wondering: Cover your entryway with liquid soap, place broken glass where the "enemy" is likely to slip and fall, "hang fishing hooks at about eye level," and, "if using firearms, shoot from the darkness inside your safe area.")

Elián's "kidnapping" also shows the federal government's insistence on imposing its values on anyone who lives outside the mainstream. Cuban-Americans like Marisleysis and Lázaro González might seem unlikely poster children for rural, white-bread militia types. But the Branch Davidians weren't right-wingers either—they were a strange religious sect. The libertarian right tends to sympathize with unconventional Americans of all stripes, as long as they've been demonized by the government and the lapdog press. They even mourn the city of Philadelphia's bombing of the black radical MOVE compound in 1985. After all, argues Phillips with characteristic understatement, "dehumanization was the kind of thing that Hitler did to the Jews in order to soften up public opinion before he sent his Gestapo in."

Then there's the notion—which Pat Buchanan addresses in his rants about U.N. control of American foreign policy—that the U.S. government is loyal not to America but to nefarious foreign powers. Ever since the Chinese fund-raising scandals, many fringe Clinton haters have suspected that the president is a Communist agent. Such notions are reinforced by the fact that Clinton and Reno largely agree with Castro about Elián's fate. And the fact that Clinton's impeachment lawyer, Greg Craig, is also Juan Miguel González's is the icing on the conspiracy theorists' cake.

And don't forget the trashing of the Second Amendment, a stock feature of right-wing conspiracies. The right is furious that the government used the possibility that the Miami family might own firearms as a pretext for its heavily armed raid. It reminds them of Waco, when the Branch Davidians' compound was raided because they were stockpiling weapons (and what's wrong with that, anyway?).

Finally, the raid confirms the federal government's open hostility toward Christianity. Right-wingers note that Clinton has refrained from bombing Iraq out of respect for Muslim holidays but seems intent on defiling important days in the Christian calendar. "One Easter, Clinton celebrated by sodomizing Monica in the Oval Office," read a typical website rant. "This Easter, Clinton celebrates by sodomizing the nation." Like the attack on the devout Branch Davidians, the raid on a Catholic home over Easter weekend is, for many, evidence of the crumbling of America's religious liberties.

So how does the nonlunatic right respond? As with Waco and Ruby Ridge, the reaction of many prominent Republicans has been almost indistinguishable from the commentary found in newsgroups like misc.activism.militia. New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani referred to the INS agents who seized Elián as "storm troopers." House Majority Whip Tom DeLay warned that "American citizens now can expect that the executive branch on their own can decide whether to raid a home." Miami Republican Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart called the seizure "an Orwellian monstrosity" and a "Gestapo-style action."

So much for Texas Governor George W. Bush's and House Speaker Dennis Hastert's efforts to put a happier, saner face on the GOP. Smart Republicans know that associating with people who hang American flags upside down might not go over well with soccer moms. But they also remember that Waco, gun control, and Clinton hatred powered a massive conservative turnout in 1994, and they think the foundations may be there for one this year, as well. Besides, many elected Republicans really do think the Clintonistas are capable of anything—including a secret deal with Castro to sell out a freedom-loving American family. In short, Elián may lead the congressional GOP to focus on rallying its base rather than playing to the center. Will it work? Yes, said a conservative wise man from another era on Fox News last Saturday. Elián, he insisted, offers one of the most important reasons to vote Republican in the 2000 elections. The name of this political sage? Newt Gingrich. ■

Phnom Penh Dispatch

Barely Trying

By SAMANTHA POWER

WHEN KHMER ROUGE soldiers marched into Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, tens of thousands of hopeful citizens lined the city's leafy boulevards to celebrate the end of Cambodia's civil war. Only when they noticed a group of infirm and elderly patients trembling in their hospital gowns and wheeling their IVs through the streets did the cheering throngs begin to grasp that something sinister was afoot. The patients, from Calmette Hospital, were merely the first residents to be brutally evicted from the capital. Within days, virtually the entire population of the city had been deported to deadly work camps in the countryside, where nearly two million Cambodians died of starvation or disease or were executed.

Twenty-five years later, Calmette Hospital is back to treating illnesses, and the Khmer Rouge officials who ordered the gunpoint evacuation are living as if nothing happened. Thioun Thoeun, minister of health in a regime that "experimented" by injecting coconut oil into patients, can be spotted shopping in Phnom Penh's pristine Lucky Supermarket, sporting a baseball cap. The president of the Khmer government, Khieu Samphan, lives in a gem and timber enclave near the Thai border, where he spends his days tilling his garden in the company of loved ones.

They are not alone. Although Cambodia's current prime minister, Hun Sen, defeated and disbanded the remnants of the Khmer Rouge in 1998, none of the perpetrators of the 1975–1979 genocide have been punished. Two of the cul-

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prits—"Duch," the commander of the infamous Tuol Sleng prison, and Ta Mok, perhaps the most brutal of the zone commanders—were arrested last year. Some, like Pol Pot, have died; many have changed their identities; a few notables have even joined Hun Sen's government, assuming senior posts like foreign minister and finance minister.

But now, after months of haggling (and, it often seems, stalling), Hun Sen and the United Nations are trying to complete a deal to establish a special tribunal of domestic and foreign judges and prosecutors to try some of the Khmer Rouge's worst offenders. The hope is that the process will meet international standards and justice will at last be served. The fear, made real by Hun Sen's antics thus far, is that the court's independence will be so compromised that it will betray the Khmer Rouge's surviving victims and make a mockery of the rule of law.

CAMBODIA'S JUSTICE SYSTEM lacks a basic infrastructure, trained lawyers and judges, and independence from the ruling party. As a result, the citizens suffer amid a deep culture of impunity. In one recent case, a police officer shot a karaoke singer in the head when she resisted his sexual advances, and he got away clean. More notoriously, a 1997 grenade attack on an opposition rally killed 16 people and wounded more than 100, and no one was arrested. Not surprisingly, a U.N. legal team recommended that a war-crimes tribunal modeled on Rwanda's and Yugoslavia's be established outside Cambodia—in Australia, Singapore, or the Philippines. But Hun Sen rejected the proposal, insisting that Cambodia would not allow itself to be treated like the "guard dog outside the courthouse." The prime minister seems willing to consent only to a tribunal that ensures that a majority of judges and prosecutors are Cambodians, whom he presumably will handpick and thus control. Foreigners will participate, but each round of negotiations curtails their authority further. Indeed, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry has just been dispatched to Phnom Penh to try to convince Hun Sen to allow the U.N.-appointed prosecutor to issue indictments independently.

All this makes Youk Chhang, who runs the Cambodian Documentation Center, anxious. "Without justice we cannot live in peace," he explains. Chhang speaks from personal experience. During the "genocide years," he not only lost his sister and his father but, as an eager 15-year-old, he egged on the killing of a man and woman who committed the crime of falling in love without official permission. He is haunted by his memory of heckling the young couple as they were beaten with bamboo sticks on the back of the neck and buried alive. Since the documentation center was established in 1995 with the help of a U.S. State Department grant and an initial partnership with Yale University, Chhang and others there have been assembling evidence of the atrocities committed during the Pol Pot era. At a minimum, the effort is intended to establish the basic facts of the genocide. But, as Chhang notes, by amassing what amounts to a treasure trove of evidence against the Khmer Rouge, it has made a trial more feasible—and thus has increased the political pressure to hold one.

The center's collection includes official party propaganda, correspondence between Khmer Rouge officers, minutes from Khmer Rouge meetings, "confessions" from victims, and notebooks and personal records kept by Khmer Rouge officials. The documents provide a detailed picture of cadre activity at the district, regional, and village levels. The Khmer Rouge, like the Nazis, were pack rats. And each official, eager to demonstrate his loyalty and attentiveness, documented the movements of virtually every blade of grass in his area. "I think they reported back not just every day but every hour of every day," marvels Chhang.

Much of the correspondence is banal. Still, hearing directly from Khmer Rouge officials offers vast insight into the logic of the revolution. After blandly recording the number of hectares in need of cultivation, the moisture of the soil, and the reasons for delayed rice shipments, functionaries shift seamlessly to the need to "smash" those they refer to interchangeably as "CIA agents," "Vietnamese lackeys," and "class enemies." And, since it was the radical, agrarian revolution that demanded the violent purges, there was no disconnect between crop diversification and cutting the enemies "into three pieces to make fertilizer for planting banana trees."

The details contained in these documents will shock many Cambodians, as more than half of the population was born after Pol Pot's reign. The trials can thus help educate the next generation. But many of the Cambodians who express support for a tribunal do so because they have misguided expectations for what it will achieve. Some assume that crimes committed in Cambodia by the United States, China, and Vietnam will be prosecuted. Others expect that the Khmer Rouge soldiers who actually performed the killings will stand trial, rather than their higher-ups. And most hope the trials will tell them, at long last, why their countrymen went mad.

These trials are likely to disappoint. They will help establish how the crimes were planned and executed, but probably not why. And it is almost certain that the tribunal will prosecute only the most senior Khmer Rouge culprits, rather than the individuals who personally carried out the genocide. Even Chhang recently submitted a proposal to the national assembly to confine the tribunal's jurisdiction to two dozen or so defendants. Only if the prosecution is limited to the most senior perpetrators, he reasoned, will Hun Sen allow a tribunal to exist at all. Meanwhile, since the tribunal's most severe sentence will be life imprisonment, not death, even the party leaders who are tried will not get the punishment many Cambodians feel they deserve.

In some ways, it is surprising that Hun Sen, who prides himself on having vanquished the Khmer Rouge, does not leap at the chance to punctuate his victory with trials. A Khmer Rouge defector who became foreign minister when the Vietnamese dislodged Pol Pot in 1979, Hun Sen has long been a master of what one might call "skull politics." Once he became prime minister, he deflected criticism by drawing national attention to Pol Pot's terror. Schoolchildren were fed a graphic diet of carnage, and the media broadcast footage that, by exposing past horrors, served to highlight the vast "improvements" brought about by his regime.

However, once Hun Sen began wooing Khmer Rouge political bosses to join his government, he downplayed his predecessors' crimes and stressed reconciliation and forget-

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ting. Cambodian textbooks now hardly mention the Khmer Rouge. On the recent twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh, Hun Sen did not commemorate the tragedy and instead urged Cambodians to look to the future, insisting that "history remains history that cannot be changed."

When it comes to the tribunal, the prime minister claims to be concerned that Cambodia's first real peace in three decades will be imperiled by the insistence of foreigners and opposition groups that old wounds be opened. But, while this may have been a sound argument against holding trials in 1997, when some 20,000 soldiers were still wearing Khmer Rouge uniforms, the Khmer Rouge has since crumbled. It's possible that if Khieu Samphan were arrested, his former underlings might stage a desperate terrorist attack, but diplomats insist the Khmer Rouge no longer possesses the capacity to make real war. In any event, given that only the Khmer Rouge's leaders will be put on trial, the likelihood of some kind of people's revolt on their behalf is slim.

The most popular explanation for Hun Sen's recalcitrance is that he is afraid of being indicted by the tribunal for having served in the Khmer Rouge. But Hun Sen defected to join the Vietnamese in 1977, and investigators have found no evidence implicating him in the executions. Another theory is that Hun Sen feels bound by secret deals he made with key Khmer Rouge leaders to get them to defect in the last few years. But, again, this seems unlikely: Cambodia's self-styled "Strongman" is hardly above a double-cross.

So if it's not personal, it's not about peace, and it's not the result of promises, why has Hun Sen so stubbornly resisted an independent tribunal? Part of the answer lies in his long-standing mistrust of the United Nations. That mistrust is widely shared in Cambodia, where the United Nations set up a democratizing mission in 1991, spent $2 billion, and, in the opinion of many Cambodians, left behind little besides steep price hikes and glossy election posters. Hun Sen's own disdain goes back even further. He still holds a grudge about the U.N. decision to withhold recognition from his regime in the 1980s and allow the Khmer Rouge coalition to hold the country's U.N. seat. "The United Nations never lifted a finger to stop the Khmer Rouge," Khieu Kanarith, Hun Sen's information minister, told me. "Now it wants to come in and steal the victory from this government."

But perhaps the best explanation is that Hun Sen is concerned that, even if he picks most of the court's judges, he may not entirely control its proceedings. The trials might both implicate his party allies and foster subversive ideas about legal accountability in the minds of his restive citizens.

Such legal trickle-down would be nice, but Cambodia's survivors are quite cynical. They figure Hun Sen will ultimately turn the tribunal into yet another fiefdom, thereby delivering only the usual lessons about the rule of law in Cambodia: that it doesn't exist. "I am thirty-six years old, and I have lived under six regimes in my life," explained Eam Thee, a moto-taxi driver in Battambang province who lost both his parents and all four of his siblings in the genocide. "And never—not under Sihanouk, Lon Nol, Pol Pot, the Vietnamese, UNTAC, or Hun Sen—have I been able to trust the Cambodian legal system. Why should I start now?" ■

Why "civil union" isn't marriage.

State of the Union

By ANDREW SULLIVAN

PERHAPS THE CURRENT moment was inevitable. Around one-third of Americans support civil marriage for gay men and lesbians; another third are strongly opposed; the final third are sympathetic to the difficulties gay couples face but do not approve of gay marriage as such. In the last ten years or so, there has been some movement in these numbers, but not much. The conditions, in short, were ripe for a compromise: a pseudomarital institution, designed specifically for gay couples, that would include most, even all, of the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage but avoid the word itself. And last week, in a historic decision, Vermont gave it to us: a new institution called "civil union."

Understandably, many gay rights groups seem ready to declare victory. They have long been uncomfortable with the marriage battle. The platform of this weekend's Millennium March on Washington for gay rights merely refers to security for all kinds of "families." The Human Rights Campaign, the largest homosexual lobbying group, avoids the m-word in almost all its literature. They have probably listened to focus groups that included people like my mother. "That's all very well," she told me in my first discussion with her on the subject, "but can't you call it something other than 'marriage?'"

The answer to that question is no. Marriage, under any interpretation of American constitutional law, is among the most basic civil rights. "Separate but equal" was a failed and pernicious policy with regard to race; it will be a failed and pernicious policy with regard to sexual orientation. The many advances of recent years—the "domestic partnership" laws passed in many cities and states, the generous package of benefits finally granted in Hawaii, the breakthrough last week in Vermont—should not be thrown out. But neither can they be accepted as a solution, as some straight liberals and gay pragmatists seem to want. In fact, these half-measures, far from undermining the case for complete equality, only sharpen it. For there are no arguments for civil union that do

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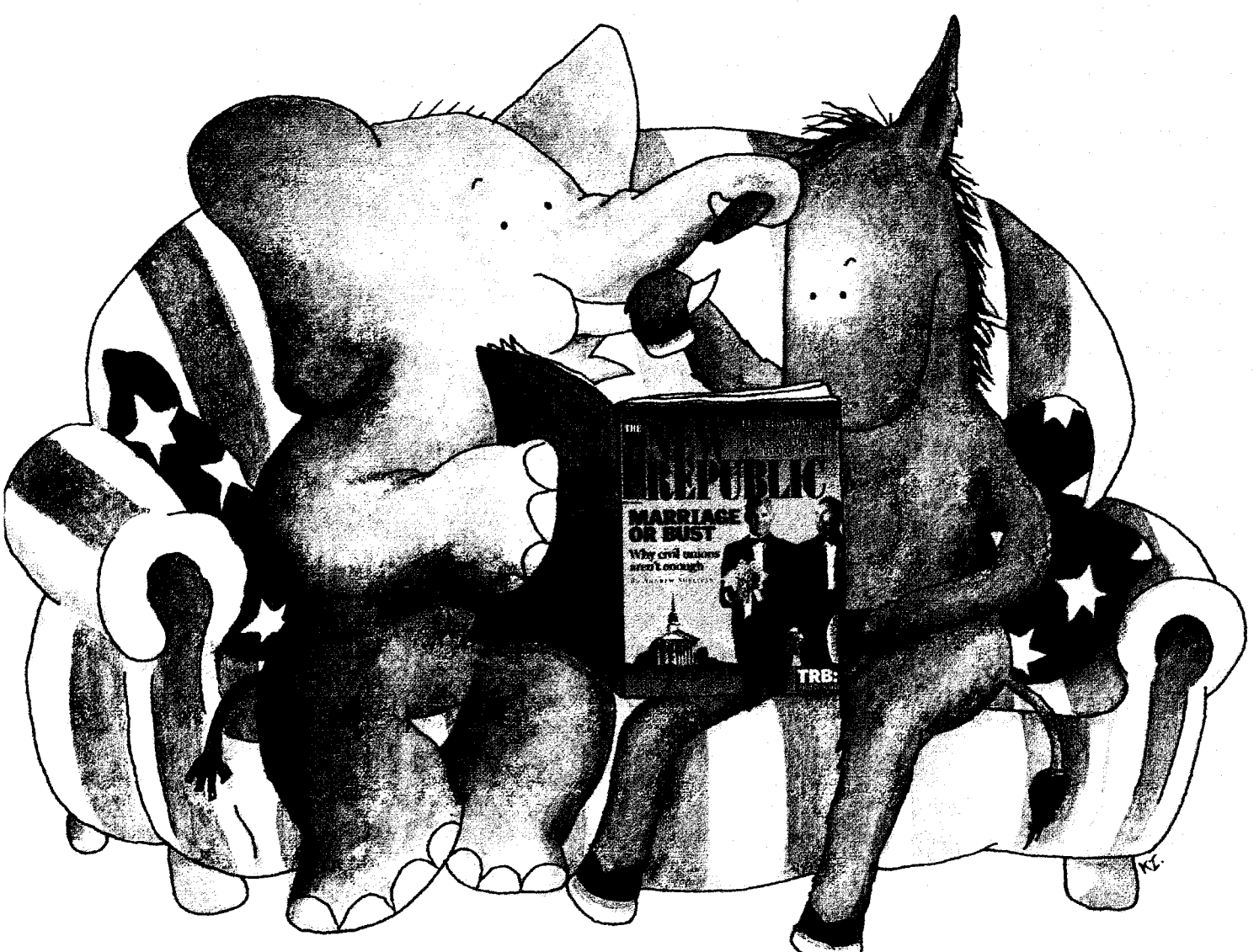

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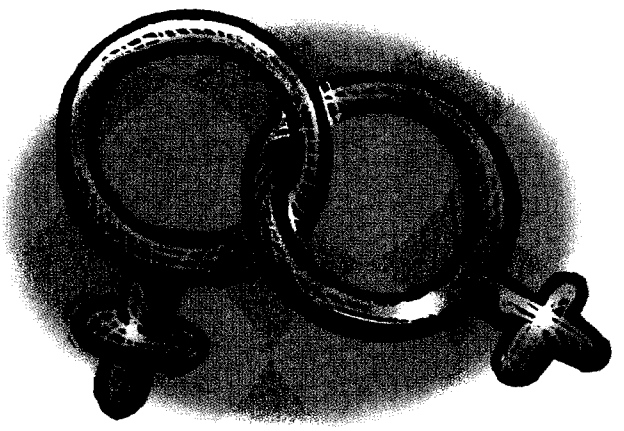
not apply equally to marriage. To endorse one but not the other, to concede the substance of the matter while withholding the name and form of the relationship, is to engage in an act of pure stigmatization. It risks not only perpetuating public discrimination against a group of citizens but adding to the cultural balkanization that already plagues American public life.

This essay is not intended for those who believe that homosexual love is sinful or immoral, or who hold that homosexuality is a sickness that can be cured, or who claim that homosexual relationships are inherently dysfunctional; these are not the people pushing the civil-union compromise. With at least a veneer of consistency, these groups want no recognition for gay couples at all. No, the people heralding civil unions are generally sympathetic to homosexual rights. They are the allies that the marriage cause cannot afford to lose. They acknowledge the equal humanity of their gay friends and fellow citizens. But they need to see that supporting civil union while opposing marriage is an incoherent position—based more on sentiment than on reason, more on prejudice than principle. Liberals, of all people, should resist it.



The most common liberal argument for civil union but against marriage was summed up by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in January. "Marriage," she said, when pressed to take a position, "has got historic, religious, and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time, and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been: between a man and a woman." This statement, which is more elaborate than anything said by Vice President Al Gore or Texas Governor George W. Bush on the topic, is worth examining.

It has two aspects. The first is an appeal to the moral, historical, and religious content of an institution unchanged since "the beginning of time." But even a cursory historical review reveals this to be fragile. The institution of civil marriage, like most human institutions, has undergone vast changes over the last two millennia. If marriage were the same today as it has been for 2,000 years, it would be possible to marry a twelve-year-old you had never met, to own a wife as property and dispose of her at will, or to imprison a person who married someone of a different race. And it would be impossible to get a divorce. One might equally say that New York's senators are men and have always been men. Does that mean a woman should never be a senator from New York?

Equally, an appeal to the religious content of marriage is irrelevant in this case. No one is proposing that faith communities be required to change their definitions of marriage, unless such a community, like Reform Jewry, decides to do so of its own free will. The question at hand is civil marriage and only civil marriage. In a country where church and state are separate, this is no small distinction. Many churches, for example, forbid divorce. But civil divorce is still legal. Many citizens adhere to no church at all. Should they be required to adhere to a religious teaching in order to be legally married?

So, if we accept that religion doesn't govern civil marriage and that civil marriage changes over time, we are left with a more nebulous worry. Why is this change to marriage more drastic than previous ones? This, I think, is what Clinton is getting at in her second point: "I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been: between a man and a woman." On the face of it, this is a statement of the obvious, which is why formulations of this kind have been favorites of those behind "defense of marriage" acts and initiatives across the country. But what, on further reflection, can it possibly mean? There are, I think, several possibilities.

The first is that marriage is primarily about procreation. It is an institution fundamentally designed to provide a stable environment for the rearing of children—and only a man and a woman, as a biological fact, can have their own children within such a marriage. So civil marriage is reserved for heterosexuals for a good, demonstrative reason. The only trouble with this argument is that it ignores the fact that civil marriage is granted automatically to childless couples, sterile couples, couples who marry too late in life to have children, couples who adopt other people's children, and so on. The proportion of marriages that conform to the "ideal"—two people with biological children in the home—has been declining for some time. The picture is further complicated by the fact that an increasing number of gay couples, especially women, also have children. Is there some reason a heterosexual couple without children should have the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage but a lesbian couple with biological children from both mothers should not? Not if procreation is your guide.

Indeed, if it is, shouldn't we exclude *all* childless couples from marriage? That, at least, would be coherent. But how would childless heterosexual couples feel about it? They would feel, perhaps, what gay couples now feel, which is that society is diminishing the importance of their relationships by consigning them to a category that seems inferior to the desired social standard. They would resist and protest. They would hardly be satisfied with a new legal relationship called civil union.

Another interpretation of Hillary Clinton's comment is that real marriage must involve the unique experience of a man attempting to relate to a woman and vice versa. Some

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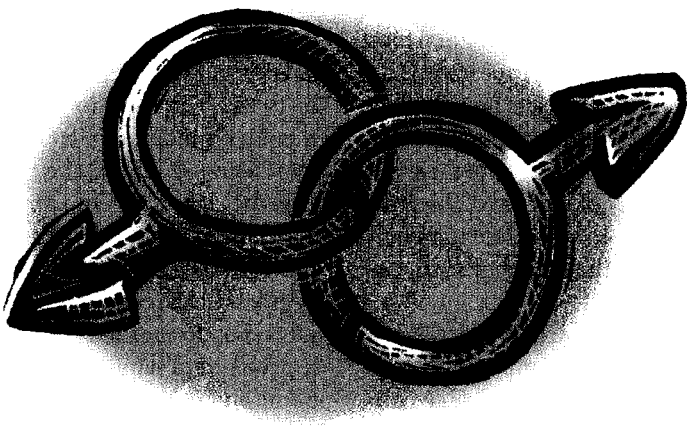
theologians have even argued that a heterosexual relationship is a unique opportunity for personal growth, because understanding a person of the opposite sex is more daunting and enriching than understanding a person of the same sex. So opposite-sex marriage builds character and empathy in a way same-sex marriage does not and therefore deserves greater social encouragement. Opposite-sex marriage fosters the virtues—communication, empathy, tolerance—necessary in a liberal democracy.

Leave aside the odd idea that heterosexual relationships are more difficult than gay ones. The problem with the character-building argument is that today's marriage law is utterly uninterested in character. There are no legal requirements that a married couple learn from each other, grow together spiritually, or even live together. A random woman can marry a multimillionaire on a Fox TV special and the law will accord that marriage no less validity than a lifelong commitment between Billy Graham and his wife. The courts have upheld an absolutely unrestricted right to marry for deadbeat dads, men with countless divorces behind them, prisoners on death row, even the insane. In all this, we make a distinction between what religious and moral tradition expect of marriage and what civil authorities require to sanction it under law. It may well be that some religious traditions want to preserve marriage for heterosexuals in order to encourage uniquely heterosexual virtues. And they may have good reason to do so. But civil law asks only four questions before handing out a marriage license: Are you an adult; are you already married; are you related to the person you intend to marry; and are you straight? It's that last question that rankles. When civil law already permits the delinquent, the divorced, the imprisoned, the sterile, and the insane to marry, it seems—how should I put this?—revealing that it draws the line at homosexuals.



Indeed, there is no moral reason to support civil unions and not same-sex marriage unless you believe that admitting homosexuals would weaken a vital civil institution. This was the underlying argument for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which implied that allowing homosexuals to marry constituted an "attack" on the existing institution. Both Gore and Bush take this position. Both Bill and Hillary Clinton have endorsed it. In fact, it is by far the most popular line of argument in the debate. But how, exactly, does the freedom of a gay couple to marry weaken a straight couple's commitment to the same institution? The obvious answer is that since homosexuals are inherently depraved and immoral, allowing them to marry would inevitably spoil, even defame, the institution of marriage. It would wreck the marital neighborhood, so to speak, and fewer people would want to live there. Part of the attraction of marriage for some heterosexual males, the argument goes, is that it confers status. One of the ways it does this is by distinguishing such males from despised homosexuals. If you remove that social status, you further weaken an already beleaguered institution.

This argument is rarely made explicitly, but I think it exists in the minds of many who supported the DOMA. One wonders, for example, what Bill Clinton or Newt Gingrich, both conducting or about to conduct extramarital affairs at the time, thought they were achieving by passing the DOMA. But, whatever its rationalization, this particular argument can only be described as an expression of pure animus. To base the prestige of marriage not on its virtues, responsibilities, and joys but on the fact that it keeps gays out is to engage in the crudest demagoguery. As a political matter, to secure the rights of a majority by eviscerating the rights of a minority is the opposite of what a liberal democracy is supposed to be about. It certainly should be inimical to anyone with even a vaguely liberal temperament.

Others argue that they base their opposition to gay marriage not on mere prejudice but on reality. Gay men, they argue, are simply incapable of the commitment, monogamy, and responsibility of heterosexuals. They should therefore be excluded as a group from an institution that rests on those virtues. They suspect that if gay marriage were legal, homosexuals would create a new standard of adultery, philandery, and infidelity that would lower the standards for the population as a whole. But, again, this is to set a bar for homosexual marriage that doesn't exist for any other group. The law as it now stands makes no judgments about the capacity of those seeking a marriage license to fulfill its obligations. Perhaps if it did the divorce rate would be lower. But it doesn't, and in a free society it shouldn't. The law understands that different people will have different levels of achievement in marriage. Many will experience divorce; some marriages may not last a week, while others may last a lifetime; still other couples might construct all sorts of personal arrangements to keep their marriages going. But the right to marry does not take any of this into account, and failing marriages and successful marriages are identical in the eyes of the law. Why should this sensible and humane approach work for everyone but homosexuals?

Or look at it this way. Even if you concede that gay men—being men—are, in the aggregate, less likely to live up to the standards of monogamy and commitment that marriage demands, this still suggests a further question: Are they less likely than, say, an insane person? A straight man with multiple divorces behind him? A murderer on death row? A

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president of the United States? The truth is, these judgments simply cannot be fairly made against a whole group of people. We do not look at, say, the higher divorce and illegitimacy rates among African Americans and conclude that they should have the right to marry taken away from them. In fact, we conclude the opposite: It's precisely *because* of the high divorce and illegitimacy rates that the institution of marriage is so critical for black America. So why is that argument not applied to homosexuals?

This, however, is to concede for the sake of argument something I do not in fact concede. The truth is that there is little evidence that same-sex marriages will be less successful than straight marriages. Because marriage will be a new experience for most gay people, one they have struggled for decades to achieve, its privileges will not be taken for granted. My own bet is that gay marriages may well turn out to be more responsible, serious, and committed than straight ones. Many gay men may not, in practice, want to marry. But those who do will be making a statement in a way no heterosexual couple now can. They will be pioneers. And pioneers are rarely disrespectful of the land they newly occupy. In Denmark, in the decade since Vermont-style partnerships have been legal, gays have had a lower divorce rate than straights. And that does not even take into account the fact that a significant proportion of same-sex marriages in America will likely be between women. If gay men, being men, are less likely to live up to the monogamy of marriage, then gay women, being women, are more likely to be faithful than heterosexual couples. Far from wrecking the neighborhood, gay men and women may help fix it up.

There remains the more genuine worry that marriage is such a critical institution that we should tamper with it in any way only with extreme reluctance. This admirable concern seems to me easily the strongest argument against equal marriage rights. But it is a canard that gay men and women are unconcerned about the stability of heterosexual marriage. Most homosexuals were born into such relationships; we know and cherish them. It's precisely because these marriages are the context of most gay lives that homosexuals seek to be a part of them. But the inclusion of gay people is, in fact, a comparatively small change. It will affect no existing heterosexual marriage. It will mean no necessary change in religious teaching. If you calculate that gay men and women amount to about three percent of the population, it's likely they will make up perhaps one or two percent of all future civil marriages. The actual impact will be tiny. Compare it to, say, the establishment in this century of legal divorce. That change potentially affected not one percent but 100 percent of marriages and today transforms one marriage out of two. If any legal change truly represented the "end of marriage," it was forged in Nevada, not Vermont.

BUT IF CIVIL UNION gives homosexuals everything marriage grants heterosexuals, why the fuss? First, because such an arrangement once again legally divides Americans with regard to our central social institution. Like the miscegenation laws, civil union essentially creates a two-tiered system, with one marriage model clearly superior to the other. The benefits may be the same, as they were for black couples, but the segregation is just as profound. One of the greatest merits of contemporary civil marriage as an institution is its civic simplicity. Whatever race you are, whatever religion, whatever your politics or class or profession, marriage is marriage is marriage. It affirms a civil equality that emanates outward into the rest of our society. To carve within it a new, segregated partition is to make the same mistake we made with miscegenation. It is to balkanize one of the most important unifying institutions we still have. It is an illiberal impulse in theory and in practice, and liberals should oppose it.

And, second, because marriage is not merely an accumulation of benefits. It is a fundamental mark of citizenship. In its rulings, the Supreme Court has found that the right to marry is vested not merely in the Bill of Rights but in the Declaration of Independence itself. In the Court's view, expressed by Chief Justice Earl Warren in *Loving* v. *Virginia* in 1967, "the freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men." It is one of the most fundamental rights accorded under the Constitution. Hannah Arendt put it best in her evisceration of miscegenation laws in 1959: "The right to marry whoever one wishes is an elementary human right compared to which 'the right to attend an integrated school, the right to sit where one pleases on a bus, the right to go into any hotel or recreation area or place of amusement, regardless of one's skin or color or race' are minor indeed. Even political rights, like the right to vote, and nearly all other rights enumerated in the Constitution, are secondary to the inalienable human rights to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' ... and to this category the right to home and marriage unquestionably belongs."

Prior even to the right to vote! You can see Arendt's point. Would any heterosexual in America believe he had a right to pursue happiness if he could not marry the person he loved? What would be more objectionable to most people—to be denied a vote in next November's presidential election or to no longer have legal custody over their child or legal attachment to their wife or husband? Not a close call.

In some ways, I think it's because this right is so taken for granted that it still does not compute for some heterosexuals that gay people don't have it. I have been invited to my fair share of weddings. At no point, I think, has it dawned on any of the participants that I was being invited to a ceremony from which I was legally excluded. I have heard no apologies, no excuses, no reassurances that the couple marrying would support my own marriage or my legal right to it. Friends mention their marriages with ease and pleasure without it even occurring to them that they are flaunting a privilege constructed specifically to stigmatize the person they are talking to. They are not bad people; they are not homophobes. Like whites inviting token black guests to functions at all-white country clubs, they think they are extending you an invitation when they are actually demonstrating your exclusion. They just don't get it. And some, of course, never will.

There's one more thing. When an extremely basic civil right is involved, it seems to me the burden of proof should lie with

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those who seek to deny it to a small minority of citizens, not with those who seek to extend it. So far, the opposite has been the case. Those of us who have argued for this basic equality have been asked to prove a million negatives: that the world will not end, that marriage will not collapse, that this reform will not lead to polygamy and incest and bestiality and the fall of Rome. Those who wish to deny it, on the other hand, have been required to utter nothing more substantive than Hillary Clinton's terse, incoherent dismissal. Gore, for example, has still not articulated a persuasive reason for his opposition to gay marriage, beyond a one-sentence affirmation of his own privilege. But surely if civil marriage involves no substantive requirement that adult gay men and women cannot fulfill, if gay love truly is as valid as straight love, and if civil marriage is a deeper constitutional right than the right to vote, then the continued exclusion of gay citizens from civil marriage is a constitutional and political enormity. It is those who defend the status quo who should be required to prove their case beyond even the slightest doubt.

They won't have to, of course. The media will congratulate George W. Bush merely for conceding that the gay people supporting his campaign are human beings. Gore will be told by his pollsters that supporting the most basic civil right for homosexuals would be political suicide, and he will surely defer to them. That is politics, and I have learned to expect nothing more from either candidate. But the principle of the matter is another issue. To concede that gay adults are responsible citizens, to concede that there will be no tangible damage to the institution of marriage by their inclusion within it, and then to offer gay men and women a second-class institution called civil union makes no sense. It's a well-meaning surrender to unfounded fear. Liberals of any stripe should see this. The matter is ultimately simple enough. Gay men and women are citizens of this country. After two centuries of invisibility and persecution, they deserve to be recognized as such. ■

Out for a Buck

LATER THIS MONTH, when Vermont becomes the first state to legalize civil unions, who'll be celebrating? Gays and lesbians, yes. Advocates of true equality regardless of sexual orientation, sure. But put out some caviar for a less likely beneficiary: the marriage industry. It will be celebrating Vermont's gain for civil rights, all right—all the way to the bank.

Entrepreneurs in the Green Mountain state are particularly giddy. Vermont innkeepers have been looking forward to this for two years, ever since the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, a national think tank, released a study claiming that the legalization of gay marriage would bring the state more than $40 million a year in tourism revenue. Indeed, when the Vermont House debated a bill legalizing same-sex unions last January, 46 innkeepers even signed a letter urging state legislators to pass it.

Now that the bill is about to become law, Randy Guy, manager of central Vermont's Chester House Inn, has created a website, GayWeddingGuide.com, where fellow gay-friendly innkeepers from around the state can advertise their services. So far 54 establishments have signed on. "Inn-keeping is a tough business," explains Guy. "In this state you have to go after new markets, and I think people see this as a big market."

Especially if, as the wedding industry hopes, the rest of the country follows Vermont's lead. Last August, Cartier began advertising its "Trinity Ring"—a piece with three bands symbolizing love, fidelity, and friendship—in *Out* magazine. While the jeweler did not bill it specifically as a wedding ring, the implication was clear. At the end of January, Encore Studios, which supplies wedding invitations to more than 4,000 stores nationwide, introduced a special gay-themed wedding invitation, complete with its own logo: two interlocking rings inside a triangle. Now Encore is advertising its invites on RainbowUnions.com, a website created ten months ago and devoted entirely to same-sex unions.

But all this pales compared to what happened on Valentine's Day, when TheKnot.com, the Internet's largest wedding-related website, announced it was partnering with PlanetOut.com, the Internet's largest gay-oriented website. The partnership means TheKnot.com will provide PlanetOut.com with content and links. It also means TheKnot.com will create a separate gay boutique, complete with a gift registry and a comprehensive library of professional advice—covering everything from how *not* to invite your homophobic relatives to whether a lesbian couple can legitimately sign a *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract). "We realized that there was a whole world of people not being accommodated," says Michael Wolfson, cofounder of TheKnot.com and, coincidentally, the brother of Evan Wolfson, director of the marriage project at the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

A few wedding-industry companies still won't market to gays, fearing it would alienate their straight clientele. But it's the ones seizing the new market who are cleaning up. Take the "cake topper" business. Wilton Industries, a top producer of those little clay figurines that sit atop wedding cakes, does not offer same-sex toppers. "We're actually a pretty conservative company," explains one Wilton spokesperson. Enter Kim Lipscomb, owner of Magical Day Cake Toppers, a small firm based in Alpharetta, Georgia. Last year Lipscomb expanded her figurine showcase to include same-sex couples, which she makes by jerry-rigging two single-sex pieces together. Now, due to a recent boom in sales, she plans to step up production and offer the couples in different styles and sizes. "We'll even offer any ethnicity you want," she adds.

Lipscomb hopes that, by getting in early, she'll make a name for herself in the gay community, which has an estimated buying power of roughly $300 billion. And timing is crucial, according to self-proclaimed gay-marketing guru Grant Lukenbill, author of *Untold Millions: Secret Truths About Marketing to Gay and Lesbian Consumers*, who argues that the gay community often affords brand-of-choice status to the first company that targets it. Lukenbill points to American Airlines, Apple Computer, Absolut Vodka, and Subaru, all of which launched intensive advertising campaigns in publications like *The Advocate*, a leading gay magazine, as far back as 15 years ago and are still reaping the economic rewards.

The race for market share, Lukenbill says, goes to the swift. Take mineral water: "Naya water has got it, but Perrier got involved only months too late." Wilton Industries, beware.

JAKE HALPERN

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Links and Antagonisms

Once in a while a film appears that is more interesting as an occasion than as a picture. Such was *The Graduate* (1967), which, however it may have faded as cinema, remains a milestone in American screen candor about sex. Now here is **Black and White** (Screen Gems), which has some filmic troubles but which may turn out to be a marker in race relations. Its subject, unarticulated but punchily dramatized, is envy: the envy of young whites for the ease and freedom of blacks. Obviously these whites would not be envious of impoverished, oppressed blacks; the whites are attracted here to hip-hop black musicians and the circle around them. The white youths in this film come from comfortable homes; the blacks are well-off, too. The theme isn't economic justice but cultural jealousy. For at least a century, jazz has been a strong link between American blacks and whites (a link, of course, with many peoples around the world). *Black and White* centers on linkage of a different temper, social as much as musical, nurtured by this new music.

The director-writer was James Toback, who has been trying for years with such films as *Fingers* to score sensationally—that is, to make a picture that would sizzle through its daring. Now he has succeeded. At once the term "writer" must be modified. Some of the sequences in the picture were done conventionally: lines were written and the actors learned them. But, as Toback himself has said, in many scenes—especially those with black musicians—he merely let the actors know what he wanted to happen and let them improvise. No one could sit down and compose this dialogue of broken phrases, repetitions, flyaways, and overlaps, especially when so much depends on emphases and intonations. These improvisations sometimes make the dialogue dense, but they certainly give it a buzz.

And this method meant inevitably that much more film was shot than was used. This is always true to some extent: here the extent had to be greater. It takes nothing away from Toback to say that *Black and White* seems to owe much to its editor, Myron Kerstein. It was the director who chose to begin shots with a moving camera—something that happens often here—but presumably it was the editor who arranged those shots in ways to make the film *course*. A fixed camera is used sparingly, mostly for long shots. In most of the intimate scenes, including some intense close-ups, the film itself seems to be in motion.

Its shape and flow are the picture's prime assets. The rhythm of the editing accommodates the rhythm of most of the music we hear, not in mimicking, Mickey-Mouse fashion, but in pulse. More: the film's nearly incessant motion underscores its adventurousness, as if it were consciously advancing into new territory.

The setting is in and around New York. At the start two teenage white girls are having sex with a black man in Central Park. One of the girls is then seen joining her family for dinner in their luxe home (with a black servant) and getting into an argument with her father who, among other matters, dislikes the gold tooth that she slips on with her black friends and doesn't always slip off at home. Obviously this is not standard parent-and-adolescent trouble.

This scene is intercut with a scene in a recording studio where black musicians are trying to arrange a recording date. A good deal of the subsequent action is set in the huge home of Rich, a black mob and music chief, where black people, mostly musicians, hang out, along with young white people—especially girls. The whites try to behave and sound and dress like their black friends. The blacks accept them, because the females are attractive and available and the males are servile.

One of the black men is a basketball star (played by Allan Houston of the Knicks); and a main plot strand is his collusion with an undercover cop to throw a game for fifty thousand dollars. (The cop's scheme seems much less a sting operation than sheer entrapment.) This leads to a crime in which a young white man is involved, and this leads to a blackmail attempt by the cop that is left unconcluded in the picture.

Brooke Shields, with dreadlocks, plays a filmmaker who is shooting a documentary about these people as their stories move along. (Why they permit it is not explained.) The filmmaker's husband, played by Robert Downey Jr., a Toback veteran, is gay. Both husband and wife make (unaccepted) moves on Mike Tyson—yes, that Tyson—who seems to be on hand in Rich's home as, for the most part, a fount of equanimity.

Several well-known black musicians are in the cast, but none of them is an especially effective actor, which is also true of the pleasant Houston. Ben Stiller, as the tricky cop, is the best actor in the picture. But even while *Black and White* is rolling, it seems to be telling us that what the actors say and do, though often sharp, is less important than the film's very existence, its record of a phenomenon. Whether *Black and White* represents a social step forward or backward or sideways is a subject for prophecy, not criticism.

The Last September (Trimark), adapted from Elizabeth Bowen's novel, repeats the *Mrs. Dalloway* problem. The Virginia Woolf novel suffered on film because there is no way to transmute Woolf's prose cinematically, and the armature of the story, even with much of her dialogue, is insufficient. Bowen is not quite in Woolf's class; still, she is a very considerable stylist, and, again, what can film do with her prose? "They stood shaking hands and laughing in the yellow theatrical sunshine." "They heard an early bugle shivering in the rain." A film can give us only the sunshine and the bugle, leaving us to supply, if we can, perception of the theatricality and the shiver

Bowen, who was Irish, tells here the story of the Anglo-Irish dilemma in 1916, when armed conflict broke out between Irish rebels and British troops, with the Anglo-Irish figuratively in-between. The setting is a large country house in County Cork, presumably much like the one that she wrote about in her family history. The central story is of a romance between the young Anglo-Irish woman who lives in that house, niece of the owners, and a rebel who had been her schoolmate. Matters are complicated by the devotion to her of a British captain.

The screenplay was written by John Banville, the well-known Irish novelist and critic, and was directed by Deborah Warner, noted in the English theater. For both Banville and Warner, this is a film debut, and for both the result is damp. Banville has tried to prune and heighten

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the drama of the book but has reduced the delicate mix of atmospheres that is the book's real reason for being. For Warner, it was something of the reverse: she was apparently so smitten by the atmospheric beauties of Slawomir Idziak's cinematography that the drama seems almost intrusive.

The best of the film comes from Maggie Smith and Michael Gambon as Sir Richard and Lady Myra, the owners of the house. Smith gives her usual performance as a creature from the stratosphere visiting Planet Earth with mild amusement, but she does it very well. Gambon makes Sir Richard an old *Punch* cartoon of a dithering aristo who is nonetheless keen-eyed. Fiona Shaw, as a visitor, enunciates like mad, trying to convert her commonplace lines into sparklers. Keeley Hawes, the young woman, is unqualifiedly dreadful.

The Bowen problem with this picture is somewhat different from the Woolf problem. An inadequate film of a Woolf novel cannot shake her place with readers. But this film of *The Last September* may cause Bowen's novels to recede even further than they have already done. A real loss.

Corrections. There were two errors in my column two weeks ago. In *East-West*, the leading male is a doctor, not a musician. In *Joe Gould's Secret*, Alice Neel's nude portrait of Gould has three penises, not two. (I lost count.) ■

Humanism and mediocrity.

The Vapor Trail of Charles Eliot Norton

By RICHARD POIRIER

The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton by James Turner

(Johns Hopkins University Press, 507 pp., $45)

I.

WHEN HIS NAME is heard at all, it is usually in connection with the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard featuring a speaker far better known than he now is. To learn more about him, you may be lucky enough to find a copy of the first and, until now, the only book-length biography, *Charles Eliot Norton: Apostle of Culture in Democracy*, by Kermit Vanderbilt. It was published in 1959, over forty years ago, and James Turner, Norton's new biographer, doesn't deign to mention it. Nonetheless, Vanderbilt's biography is a useful and engaging book, managing in less than 250 pages, exclusive of index, notes, and the like, to cope intelligently enough with the important facts and the besetting issues of Norton's life. And a long life it was: from 1827 to 1908, from Emerson, with whom he was friendly, to the arrival of T.S. Eliot as an undergraduate at Harvard in 1906, where he studied with Irving Babbitt, who had fallen under Norton's influence in the early 1890s, before Norton's retirement as professor of the history of fine arts in 1898. Measured another way, Norton's life embraced the Mexican War, the Civil War, and the war with Spain. In this same period, the population of the United States increased ten times over, from 9.5 million in 1820 to more than 91 million in 1910.

Other than the hard-to-find Vanderbilt book and, now, this much heftier one, brief accounts of Norton's life and accomplishments can be found in a number of reference books, and he plays a minor part in the letters, the journals, and the biographies of his many illustrious friends, including William and Henry James, Santayana, Howells, Edith Wharton and, in England, Ruskin, Carlyle, and Darwin. He is often touched upon in accounts of the period between 1865 and 1914, the years covered by Van Wyck Brooks's *New England Indian Summer*, which appeared in 1940. According to the belligerent Brooks, Norton "was confirmed by those two masters"—he means Carlyle and Ruskin—"in his own contumelious, cavilling habits of mind." To more serious purpose he figures in some recent tracings of the cultural undercurrents of the period, notably in Jackson Lears's *No Place of Grace*, a study of anti-modernist sentiment among latter-day members of Norton's class of patrician and mostly Boston intellectuals, and Ross Posnock's *The Trial of Curiosity*, which carries the subtitle *The Challenge of Modernity*.

What is most essential to an understanding of Norton, however, is not to be found anywhere in bookstores, new or used, and not even in most libraries. I mean, of course, his own writings. Except for his much admired translation of *The Divine Comedy* into English prose, not one of his several books and monographs, most significantly *Considerations of Some Recent Social Theories* (1853) and *Historical Study of Church-Building in the Middle Ages: Venice, Siena, Florence* (published in 1880; reprinted in 1902), has been in print for close to a century or more. His reviews and articles, more than 500 of them, are to be found only in the journals where they first appeared, going back as far as 1847.

There has never been a collected or selected edition of Norton's writings. I managed to locate in a rare-book store the two-volume *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, edited by his daughter Sara and M.A. de Wolfe Howe. It was last published in 1913. Important letters are left out and passages from some letters have been deleted. But there are compensatory biographical commentaries and appendices, and the letters remain the best place to get a sense of Norton's personality and the quality of his mind under a variety of circumstances. In addition to the letters, I have managed, with some help, to get hold of photocopies of some other writings of his. In all, a quite tedious and time-consuming effort.

Given these difficulties, anyone interested in Norton will be grateful, initially at least, for the crowded 500 pages of Turner's book. While its utility is considerably lessened by the glaring inadequacies of the index, Turner does provide a valuable listing of the titles, dates, and places of publication for what appear to be all

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of Norton's publications. There are biographical details aplenty, in such abundance that the author overwhelms himself with elaborations of them, and with his often-frustrated (and frustrating) attempts to take interpretive command of the accumulating mass. In the process, Norton as a personality gets lost in heavy-handed accounts of his scholarly achievements, and trophy lists of friends who were also men of achievement, and accounts of his public benefactions and controversies.

It was, it seems, a life lived entirely in the head, a life devoted to Thinking, none of it either powerful or adventurous—thinking about art, about education, about immigration, the cultural state of the Union, the European-American contrast, about money and, now and again, but not very often and never intimately, about his family. Next to nothing is volunteered about Norton's private likes and dislikes, his appetites, his spontaneous enthusiasms (if he had any), his gossipy interests in other people. Scarcely anything, for example, is said by Norton, by Vanderbilt or by Turner, about his sister Grace. An imposing Cambridge dowager, she was (according to John Jay Chapman) easily as smart as her brother and could be just as tough, a feisty woman of contentious intellect and powerful personality with her own hospitable home and a circle of distinguished friends. It is hard from the letters, or from Turner, to get much of an impression even of Norton's wife, Susan Sedgwick Norton, though we are told that Ruskin was "jealous" of her and that she admired John Stuart Mill. She died at the age of thirty-four while traveling with Norton and the family in Germany, after giving birth to the last of six children. Norton, a widower of forty-five, would come increasingly to miss her, especially late in life, when his old friends were dying off. But he never remarried and apparently expressed no interest in other women. In fact, he had shown little interest in them even before his marriage.

Perhaps Norton really was all Mind, all public and scholarly and social-literary enterprise. If so, then it is worth some speculation as to the human costs involved. None is offered. Turner tends to attribute Norton's rather frequent periods of depression, as does Norton himself, to exhaustion from work or to developments in the body politic rather than in his own. Why is it, for example, that none of the underclass whom Norton wants to educate and lift from poverty seem, as individuals, ever to excite his affection or amusement or interest? He never once shows any inquisitiveness about the rhythm or the texture of their daily lives or daily activities, about the things that they actually were able to accomplish on their own, without the particular kind of education that he wants provided for them. He is ignorant of how and why the necessities of earning a living make any attention to the finer things less urgent than he thinks it ought to be.

A similar remoteness characterizes Norton's art criticism. The work of art for him becomes yet another form of history, never a form of individual expression, of genius or sexuality or playfulness. Turner seems vaguely to sense some such limitation, as when he remarks that "the archetypal Venetian pair, Titian and Tintoretto, appealed to him largely because they recorded with consummate skill and sensitivity their own cultural moment." But is that all they "recorded"? Did Michelangelo "record"? It is all pretty hopeless: the critic first decides what that "moment" is and then goes prowling through works of art for a record of it. Of course, the Nortons among us won't think it hopeless at all.

It was often said that Norton was sweet and gentle. Some, however, found him a rather troubling oddity. Members of the James family can always be depended on to take impressions that are more circumstantially creditable than most others, and in a marvelously funny and malicious example, just the sort of thing that Turner does not mention or quote, Henry James Sr., writing to Emerson in the fall of 1860, describes Norton as a kind of dehumanized interloper, trying to cozy up to Hawthorne during a dinner at Boston's Saturday Club. Hawthorne, he writes, "seemed much nearer the human being than any one at that end of the table, much nearer . . . My heart broke for him as that attenuated Norton kept putting forth his long antennae towards him, stroking his face and trying whether his eyes were shut . . . It was heavenly to see him persist in ignoring Charles Norton, and shutting his eyes against his spectral smiles: eating his dinner and doing absolutely nothing but that."

Vanderbilt remarks that "family papers leave no record that he ever tumbled out of trees, roamed away from home, or brought stray animals into the house." He gets it right, I suspect, when he goes on to observe that "in a very real sense, Norton appears never to have been a child at all." On his first trip abroad, while still in his early twenties, his letters home from India are preponderantly about social and educational conditions and the debilitating effects of imperial rule on the British as well as the Indians. There is next to nothing about the strange habits, the exotic dress, the unfamiliar food, the physical attributes of a people wholly new to him, or the varied wonders of the natural scenery. Many years later, in a letter in 1882, he states it as a general principle that "mere natural beauty leaves us cold; even the picturesque grows wearisome; a new country, though it be more beautiful in aspect than Greece, is dreary except for its promise of human history." So much for the Sublime, in, say, the landscapes of Turner, a painter that he had learned to appreciate under the tutelage of Ruskin.

After a tour of the Louvre with Norton in 1872, James wrote his sister Alice that he had come to "feel less and less at home [with him], owing to a high moral je ne sais quoi which passes quite above my head." It was a feeling echoed two years later by the ever-faithful Howells in a letter to James Russell Lowell, who was then in Paris himself: "It comes very natural at this time of year in Cambridge to love one's country. The apple-blossoms are worth all that past of which Mr. Norton sighs to find us disinherited. There is one apple-tree in Miss Wyman's backyard worth the whole of the middle ages. And only imagine the oriels tilting the cups of blooms, and draining the honeyed heeltaps everywhere. A riverderci presto!"

When Norton died in 1907, it was in the same house, called Shady Hill, where he was born eighty years earlier. He was the third of what were to be the six children of Andrews Norton, a Biblical scholar, philologist, and professor of divinity at Harvard, and Catherine Eliot, the daughter of perhaps the richest merchant prince of Boston, who was also, like many of the Boston mercantile class in those days, a man of scholarly inclination, with more than 4,000 books in his library. Shady Hill was part of Catherine Eliot's dowry, covering thirty-five acres including a colonial-style mansion. (The site of the house is now occupied by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, while the thirty-five acres have long since been absorbed into the Harvard campus.)

The Norton-Eliot marriage could itself represent a lost era, when there existed a harmonious, functioning, fruitful union between wealth and high culture, between financial enterprise and the pursuit of learning. This was a part of the inheritance of those old Boston families whose lineage extended back to the early settlers, among whom were the Nortons, the Eliots, the Lowells, and the Adamses. Those first settlers were both hard-laboring pioneers and men of learning. They were often religious scholars who worked side by side with the barely educated laborers whom they had brought with

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them. They had also brought, regardless of the extremely limited cargo space on those little ships, hundreds of precious books: agricultural manuals, but also Latin and English literature, books for the instruction of children, and religious meditations.

Like many of his class and his generation in Boston, Charles Norton was raised to assume that this was the best order of things, and that it was his mission to perpetuate or to revive it—or at least to give voice to its presumptions. After graduating from Harvard, tenth in a class of sixty-six—Harvard in 1846 was nowhere near the great world university that it would become—young Norton conducted himself as if, like his ancestors, he could at the same time be a diligent man of business and a scholar. While for the next three years he successfully held down a job in the East India trade, for which Boston was then a center, he spent his evenings during 1848 helping his new friend Francis Parkman revise proofs of *The Oregon Trail* while at the same time writing a forty-page article on Coleridge for the *North American Review*, then the most intellectually prestigious of American journals.

His superiors at Bullard and Lee were themselves the sort of men who assumed that the business trip that Norton undertook to India in May 1849 would include, on the way home, his first cultural tour of Europe. Not ending till January 1851, twenty months in all, the whole trip allowed him, using a good supply of letters of introduction, to meet his first contingent of distinguished Englishmen, including Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell, and John Ruskin. Over subsequent years these and other English friends would be generously welcomed to Shady Hill. The English, then as now, assumed that in any American city where they could find a friend they need not also look for an adequate hotel.

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Charles Eliot Norton, November 1861

II.

NORTON'S FUTILE EFFORT of a lifetime was somehow to reaffirm the cultural authority once exercised by his scholarly-entrepreneurial New England forebears. All the while he seemed oblivious to the special and limited nature of that authority, even in its ascendancy. For one thing, those who first exercised it were in fact utterly unique within the early patterns of immigration into America. They were less like immigrants (or so it has always seemed to me) than like the refugees who, in the 1930s and 1940s, arrived from Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union to energize American culture, science, and academic life. For another, that early authority had first asserted and tested itself over a region comparatively tiny and distinct within the ever-expanding America that started to emerge even before the Revolution.

By the time Norton graduated from Harvard, those areas of the country that might once have looked for leadership to New England were already beginning to turn toward New York as a more vigorous center of commercial and publishing-literary activity. Norton's cultural nostalgia was no less remote from the American realities within which it proposed to be so effective than would be the nostalgia, say, of the Southern Agrarians of the 1920s. It is not surprising that Norton influenced their thinking, however indirectly, through a circuitous route that leads from Norton's admirer Irving Babbitt, the leader of the New Humanists of the 1920s, to T. S. Eliot, who, again, had been taught by Babbitt at Harvard, and on to Allen Tate, one of the leading Agrarians who was in turn a devotee of Eliot's poetry and social criticism. (It was while Eliot held the Charles Eliot Norton professorship at Harvard in 1932–33 that he traveled to the University of Virginia to deliver the lectures that became the notoriously reactionary and anti-Semitic little book *After Strange Gods*, which he and his executors have wisely never allowed to be reprinted.)

Turner remarks at one point that Charles Eliot Norton had inherited "the old Boston view of America's historical predicament." More exactly, it seems to me, he had inherited the old Boston view of Boston's own predicament in an America that early in the nineteenth century was already becoming increasingly distanced, geographically and temperamentally, from Boston's cultural instructions and admonitions. Turner has located an address given by Andrews Norton in 1819, four years before the birth of Charles, in which he speaks of America as an "experiment" whose outcome is up for grabs. The "experiment," he says, "would determine what man may become when placed in the most favorable circumstances." And it appeared even then that the "experiment" might well produce "a sort of barbaric empire" with a "half-civilized population spread out over our soil, ignorant of all that adorns, and ennobles, and purifies the character of man."

Nearly seventy years later, in an essay on "The Intellectual Life in America" that he published in 1888, Andrews's son Charles offers the same prognosis in an equally vapid and self-intoxicatingly insistent prose:

> [I]f our civilization is to be prevented from degenerating into a glittering barbarism of immeasurable vulgarity and essential feebleness; if our material prosperity is to become but the symbol and source of mental energy and moral excellence,—it is by the support, the increase, the steady improvement of institutions devoted to the highest education of our youth.

This kind of harrumphing, found throughout Norton's critical writings, gives a bad name to the "highest education" of which he himself, it is to be assumed, is a proud possessor and purveyor. "Mental energy"? Where in all of his critical vocabulary is there any evidence of it? And how can arguments framed in such vacuous generalities and gentilities possibly excite "mental energy" in readers or students? The logic seems to be that since the predictive warnings issued by

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Norton senior in 1819 had not come true seventy years later, it was a good time *not* to question the analysis and the hypotheses behind the warnings. It was time simply to repeat them—as people of like mind now continue to do, on into the new millennium.

NORTON'S THINKING IS never invigorated or sharpened by the effort to put it into words. His language is characteristically abstract, evasive, the terms never activating one another, never competing for primacy within his sentences. They merely recline as on a fog bank of cultural nostalgia for old Massachusetts, which he construes as the cradle of America as a whole. "She was," he says in 1865, "the mother of ideas and of the states." In fact, "she" was not the mother even of the Virginia Settlements, which date back to 1607 and which were responsible in 1619 for the first representative government in the New World. In Virginia, the immediate need for laborers was mostly satisfied by the forced importation of African slaves. This same necessity in Massachusetts was largely met by immigrants of English and later Scotch-Irish descent, about half of whom, before 1776, were indentured servants. Only some of these could read and write, while in the South the slaves were customarily discouraged or prevented from learning to do either.

From the very outset, the physical and economic necessities of settling in a new, totally undeveloped continent, and the desire of the elite families to secure their authority through the accumulation of wealth, required ever-increasing numbers of immigrants. And these same immigrants account for that "half-civilized population spread out over our soil" so feared by Norton, father and son. From Europe alone, between 1820 and 1924, immigrants numbered no fewer than thirty-two million. They were not, as a rule, in search of religious freedom or political democracy. They were motivated, rather, by worsening economic conditions at home, and by the dream of a better, less impoverished life for themselves and their families. Not arriving already in possession of learning and of cultural appreciation, they could hardly have been expected to reach out for it when it was first necessary to pay off indentures and to earn enough money to pay for passage of family members left behind, while also earning enough to feed and to shelter themselves.

In the process, already-existing structures of political or cultural authority were necessarily imperiled, but who was to blame for that? The situation was further complicated by what Tocqueville in 1835 was calling "a double movement of migration" that never halts: "So the European quits his hovel to go and dwell on the transatlantic coast, while the American who was born there moves off in turn into the central solitudes of America." Nothing, Tocqueville adds, is "comparable to this continuous movement of mankind except perhaps that which followed the fall of the Roman empire."

A vital difference will immediately occur to anyone: in America, this "continuous movement of mankind" signals not the end but the beginning of empire. It was to be greater in extent even than Rome's, stretching from ocean to ocean and beyond both coastlines until, economically, it dominated the world. However noble the initial motives of the Mayflower pilgrims in their search for a place freely to practice and publish their faith, the unavoidable acts of implementation required not only economic enterprise and self-enrichment (Norton's "religious-industrial colonies") but acts, too, of often barbarous and bloody seizure from the Indian occupants, the forced displacement and in some cases the violent shattering of their tribes. Incipient plutocracy and manifest imperialism—for Norton, the two signs of the anticipated coming of a "glittering barbarism"—were in evidence from the very outset, essential parts of the "American experiment" and essential, just as surely, to the continuing power of Boston's first families.

III.

WHAT IS TO be made of Charles Eliot Norton? In a final, desperate effort to get on top of his own uncertainties, Turner tries simply to dispel them through hyperbole. Norton is suddenly hailed as "a colossus," and, no fewer than five times in a half-dozen pages, it is said that "he invented Western civilization." There is also a little rhapsody about "so astonishing a work," meaning not any work in particular but "the replacement . . . of ebbing religiosity with a new secular spirituality coaxed from art and literature."

New? Not quite. This same kind of coaxing had been going on far more effectively in England throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the flourishing years of Matthew Arnold (one of Norton's correspondents), and Pater, and Wilde. Assured that in 1875 Norton was regarded as "America's leading authority on art," the reader will only wonder if he had any competition at all, having been told in the same chapter, covering the years 1873 to 1878, that "he had a scholarly disposition at bottom more trenchant than original." By 1885, the very organization that Norton had helped to found in 1879, the Archaeological Institute of America, had apparently developed in just a few years to a point where "the expertise that the AIA nurtured encouraged a degree of specialization that began to raise questions about the limits of its founder's competence."

The truth is that Charles Eliot Norton was not a "colossus." He invented nothing; and by English or European standards he does not count as a distinguished scholar. Being indifferent to the formal and technical aspects of art, he cannot be considered a critic whose work can be taken seriously now even as a representation of the methods that it borrowed. In a memorial essay entitled "An American Art-Scholar: Charles Eliot Norton 1908," Henry James finds, I think, exactly the right leverage for an assessment of Norton's achievement. Written in James's late style, for which Norton, who had liked the earlier work, had little patience, the critical bent of the piece emerges slowly, persuading the reader through accumulation of innuendo rather than assertion, and by an evident concern that he may still be exaggerating Norton's accomplishments. It all adds up to a refusal to grant Norton anything close to major status, leaving him the enjoyment of such status as he does deserve (and exploit), thanks to its having been attained in a situation so culturally barren that he faced neither competition nor the prospect of adverse criticism:

> To have grown up as the accomplished man at large was in itself at that time to have felt, and even in some degree to have suffered, this hand of differentiation; the only accomplished men of the exhibited New England Society had been the ministers, the heads of the congregations—whom, however, one docks of little of their credit in saying that their accomplishments and their earnestness had almost wholly been in the moral order. The advantage of that connection was indeed what Norton was fundamentally to have enjoyed in his descent, both on his father's and his mother's side (pre-eminently on the latter, the historic stock of the Eliot's) from a long line of those stalwart pastoral worthies who had notably formed the aristocracy of Massachusetts. It was largely, no doubt, to this heritage of character and conscience that he owed the strong and special strain of confidence with which he addressed himself to the business of perfect candour toward his fellow-citizens—his pupils in particular; they, to whom this candour was to become in the long run the rarest and raciest and most endearing of "treats," being but his fellow-citizens in the making . . . if he ultimately embraced

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the fine ideal of taking up the work that lay close to him at home, and of irrigating the immediate arid tracts and desert spaces, it was not from ignorance of the temptation to wander and linger where the streams already flowed and the soil had already borne an abiding fruit.

He had come to Italy and to England early in life; he had repeated his visits to these countries with infinite relish and as often as possible—though never, as a good New Englander, without certain firm and, where they had to be, invidious discriminations; he was attached to them by a hundred intellectual and social ties; but he had been from the first incapable of doubting that the best activity and the liveliest interest lay where it always, given certain conditions, lies in America—in a measure of response to intellectual and esthetic "missionary" labour more traceable and appreciable, more distinguishably attested and registered, more directly and artlessly grateful, in a word, than in the thicker elemental mixture of Europe. On the whole side of taste and association his choice was thus betimes for conscious exile and for a considerably, though doubtless not altogether irremediably, deprived state; but it was at the same time for a freedom of exhortation and a play of ironic comment less restricted, after all, in the clear American air, than on ground more pretentiously enclosed—less restricted, that is, from the moment personal conviction might be absolute and indifference to every form of provincial bewilderment equally patient and complete. The incontestable *crânerie* of his attitude—a thing that one felt to be a high form of sincerity—always at last won success; the respect and affection that more and more surrounded him and that finally made his situation sole of its kind and pre-eminently happy, attest together the interesting truth that unqualified confidence in one's errand, the serenest acceptance of a responsibility and the exercise of a critical authority never too apt to return critically upon itself, only require for beneficent action that they be attended at once with a fund of illustration and a fund of good humour.

Norton's frequent trips to Europe, once staying with his entire family for close to five years, and his life long correspondence with England's leading men of letters have, according to James, given him the confidence to speak on the home front with a "freedom of exhortation" and of "ironic comment" that would not have been tolerated from a man of his stature in, say, London or Paris. He is assured in America of an audience so innocent of high culture as to be "artlessly grateful" to him for whatever he says.

James is dissecting his specimen with particular delicacy of touch, and with the intention, it would seem, less to injure Norton than to reveal the limiting peculiarities of his situation and, correspondingly, the limited capabilities required of an American man of letters, no matter how well-traveled. What James discerns as Norton's "unqualified confidence in his own errand" as an educational missionary to his own country is a result of his having the academic platform as well as the public stage for that sort of thing pretty much to himself. As the first professor of fine arts ever appointed at Harvard, he particularly need have no fear that his "exercises in critical authority" might be turned against him in Cambridge. The extraordinary popularity of his course lectures can thus be understood as the youthful appreciation of a good show featuring a celebrity-prof, and an eccentric in the bargain:

> An exhilarated invocation of close responsibility, an absolute ease of mind about one's point of view, a thorough and never-failing intellectual wholeness, are so far from weakening the appeal to young allegiances that, once they succeed at all, they succeed the better for going all their length. So it was that, with admirable urbanity of form and uncompromising straightness of attack, the Professor of the History of the Fine Arts at Harvard for a quarter of a century let himself go ....

Norton addresses the problem of American cultural bareness with none of James's ironic and affectionate speculativeness. He is characteristically flat-minded on the issue throughout his correspondence, and admits, in the 1888 essay "The Intellectual Life of America," that America

> has made very considerable additions to knowledge, chiefly in those departments of science which are most closely allied to practical affairs; and during the last half-century she has added, beyond all other nations, to the inventions by which the comfort of man is enhanced, his labor saved and rendered more productive, and his wealth augmented; but it would be rash to assert that she has contributed much to the thoughts by which his life is ennobled, to the criticism by which its aims are defined and improved, or to that science, at once the product and the source of philosophy, by which the order of the universe and his relations to it are ascertained.

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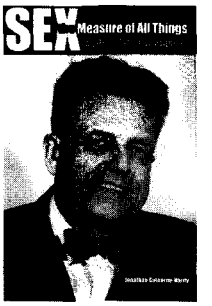

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Paraphrasing Mill's essay "On Liberty," which appeared in 1859, Norton directs his own fire at the tyranny of majority rule in America. That majority is by now increasingly unlettered, he complains, and therefore the more manipulable. Why? Because, he says, "wealth has become the chief modern form of power ... usurping the dominion of the old ideals over the imagination, it is sought, not only as a means to other ends but as itself an end."

The author of *The Education of Henry Adams*, written by the descendent of another, still-more-distinguished old Boston family—and whose earlier writings had occasionally appeared in *The North American Review* while Norton was for a time its editor—would have been embarrassed by this resurrection into the present-perfect tense of the hoary idea that "wealth *has become* the chief form of modern power." Adams's own theories as to the nature of power in the modern world at least took account of technological developments since the Cave of Mammon. No less familiar, but conspicuously platitudinous in Norton's rendering, is the proposal that the best way, and maybe the only way, to counteract the damaging obsession with wealth is through exactly the kind of educational programs that Adams was to declare, in his own case, a failure.

IV.

Most of the time, Norton is a ghostly presence in his already ghost-ridden prose. Even places and landscapes are described as they would be in a guidebook, with no indication of what it may have felt like for some particular person actually to have been there. When discussing the wonders of Gothic architecture in Siena or Florence, he shows talents as a storyteller, touching on social and historical conditions, but it is only the reflection of these conditions that he then looks for in details of the artistry—not evidences of individuated human agency, but the "spirit and devotion of the whole community." As if the "whole community" had held the chisel that fashioned the sometimes marvelously grotesque filigree adorning façades and church gables.

When Norton does refer to "the artist," it is to assure us that "the sources of his inspiration were the natural sources of life" shared, he then assumes, by the whole community. It was, he likes to say, the "moral import" of the work that was the artist's "chief concern; and his work at its best illustrates with peculiar simplicity and distinctness the truth which has determined the character of all supreme artistic production—that in the highest forms of human expression morality and beauty are inseparable." It requires a sort of pretentious illiteracy to suppose that such formulations as these mean much of anything, with their "high moral *je ne sais quoi*."

Nowhere in his *Historical Study of Church-Building in the Middle Ages* (1880) does Norton get close enough to point now to this detail of execution, now to that; nowhere does he help us to recognize the quirks, the whimsicalities of artistic shaping, the delights in human and animal sexuality that adorn particular parts of medieval works. It should not be expected of any critic of Norton's time, much less one of his limited ability, to write with the special genius of the great Meyer Schapiro, as represented, say, in the collection of his pieces in 1979 entitled *Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art*; but surely it is fair to ask that any interpreter of such material teach us closely to look at it, as Schapiro does, and not beforehand to have screened it off by some intervening grid of historical reconstruction that will then determine what it is we can expect to find there, the "beauty" or some moral message.

Take even a few sentences from Schapiro's review in 1966 of a book about images found in the margins of some thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century devotional manuscripts. These images can be matched, as Schapiro points out, in the choir stalls and other sculpted and painted fields in churches of the same period. There he finds "convincing evidence of the artist's liberty, his unconstrained possession of the space, which confounds the view of medieval art as a model of systematic order and piety." Norton is temperamentally incapable of any approximation of Schapiro's interpretive freedom, or even his enthusiasms of close observation:

> This art is a boundless reservoir of humor, spirited play, and untamed vitality. The ape is everywhere, inviting the viewer to recognize the animal core of human behavior in the easy transition of all the higher forms of social life—learning, religion, law—into simian games. It is a process of desublimation through which the distance between the natural and the civilized is abolished. No other art in history offers so abundant an imagery of the naked and clothed body as a physical engine. Free from classic norms, the artist experiments with the human frame as the most flexible, ductile, indefatigably protean, self-deforming system in nature. He anticipates with irreverent playfulness the more somber study of the human body by Renaissance artists.

Norton suppressed anything in medieval art that might have persuaded him, or his students, that it was indeed full of "irreverent playfulness," or that it may actually "confound the view of medieval art as a model of systematic order and piety." Nor could he freely acknowledge that these features of medieval art then constitute a link to corresponding features in Renaissance works, with their more marked evidences of individuality, eccentricity, and luxuriant pleasure. Michelangelo might, Norton conceded, be a genius, but his work nonetheless showed "too much anatomy."

One of Norton's most disabling social presumptions is that as a leader of the nearly expired New England elite, he must assume an essentially educational mission to the less fortunate and also less intellectually able. In pursuit of that mission he seems prepared even to suppress or to distort any evidence that might overcomplicate the sustaining ideals and myths he thinks necessary to the moral instruction of the masses. In the introductory chapter of *Church-Building*, for example, he tells us that the Catholic Church was at times required to idealize itself in "the midst of darkness and confusion and dread," and for the reason that "it is by ideals and fanciful concepts that men of imperfectly trained intelligence are apt to be most powerfully affected." It follows, necessarily, that at a time like his own, when it was imagined that a new barbarism was ready to take hold, it would be the duty of educators like himself to perpetuate ideals of the past even if these were known to have been "fanciful" at their inception.

Nearly all of the varied initiatives that Norton undertook during an exceptionally active life, including his help in the founding of *The Nation* in 1865, were motivated by the same moral-missionary purpose. That purpose, and the sometimes insufferable condescensions that went with it, is evident even in his ultimately successful campaign in 1880, assisted by his friend Frederick Law Olmsted, the architect of Central Park, to prevent Niagara Falls from becoming the site of an electric power plant and to preserve it instead as a state park. In a letter enlisting the help of a small-town newspaper editor in Indiana named J.B. Harrison, Norton could as easily have been describing the purposes behind his fine-arts course or his critical writings in general:

> I should be glad to have you write something to indicate to the mass of unreflecting, uneducated Americans what the value of noble scenery may be in its influence upon life and character; to

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> show them how it should be regarded, and to point out to them the need of self-education in order properly to appreciate the beauty of Nature, and to recognize the lessons for life which are to be drawn from it. The mass of visitors to Niagara go there to look at it as a curious phenomenon, one that excites their wonder, and stimulates their national pride, as being the finest and most famous waterfall in the world. Very few of them recognize in it one of those works of Nature which is fitted to elevate and refine the character, and to quicken the true sense of the relations of man with that Nature of which he is a part, to the beauty of which he should be sensitive, and of whose noble works he should feel himself to be the guardian.

Thirty-five years earlier, in 1846, and in a similar frame of mind, Norton started the first night schools in the Cambridge-Boston area mostly for Irish immigrant workers, and then, in 1850, he proposed a financial scheme to help some of them with decent housing. The housing plan, he argued, would bring profit to the developers while at the same time persuading a potentially rowdy, potentially disruptive minority that it had an investment in the preservation of the traditional social order. He felt no need to mention that another desirable consequence of the project could be a recognition by this same "mass of unreflective and uneducated Americans" of the inestimable moral superiority and enlightenment of their benefactors.

And if the uneducated mass of Americans need instruction on how to appreciate Niagara Falls, they can hardly be entrusted with the responsibilities of self-governance. Norton's *A Consideration of Some Recent Social Theories*, published in 1853 when he was barely thirty years old, is, accordingly, a short but sharp attack on the social doctrines of figures such as Louis Kossuth, Giuseppe Mazzini, the earlier theories of Charles Fourier, and, closer to home, Robert Owen. All of these, he charged, shared in an illusion that must be dispelled: the desirability, even the possibility, of "direct government by the people itself." Any experiment of that kind, he maintained, would be prohibitively dangerous in the United States, where the people had already been given, as they never had in Europe, unprecedented opportunities for economic and social advancement.

Though "unreflective," the American lower classes had some reason to believe that they had themselves contributed to the rules that governed them, to community order, and to the principles of equal opportunity. If, despite that, experiments in greater self-governance would be dangerous in America, then in Europe they would prove altogether disastrous. The European masses had for centuries been deprived of the most rudimentary economic and political privileges and of the responsibilities that go with them. In the theories of his European adversaries, Norton complained, "The old doctrine of the divine right of kings has been supplanted by one not less absurd—the divine right of people."

V.

NORTON'S PRESUMPTUOUS claims to cultural authority, and thereby to political authority, become particularly troubling when exercised in time of war. In the Spanish-American War of 1898, and earlier in the Civil War, the worthiness of his general positions has obscured the sophistry in his supporting arguments and their remoteness from common experience—more generally, the failures in Norton's capacity for human understanding. In the one case, he strongly supported the Union, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the immediate granting of the vote to newly liberated slaves; in the other case, he spoke out as an avowed anti-imperialist.

The Spanish-American War prompted Norton to resurrect James Russell Lowell's condemnations of the Mexican War in 1846–1848. The Mexican War was an immensely dispiriting expression of American imperial ambition, especially for those determined to believe that it had not ever before expressed itself. An easy victory allowed the annexation of Texas, along with the territories of New Mexico and California. And the Spanish-American War was only a further extension of American power, this time into the reaches of the Pacific, taking in the territory of the Philippines, and, in the Atlantic, the possession of Puerto Rico and the control of Cuba. "A splendid little war," said John Hay, the American secretary of state.

Norton's anti-imperialist stance was shared by nearly all his friends and acquaintances. William James, for example, was for a time vice president of the New England Anti-Imperialist League. It should not be assumed, however, that in their opposition to America's expansionist policies, Norton or James or others of their class were to any great extent motivated by humanitarian feeling. It revealed, rather, the depth of their patriotism, their American jingoism, their strongly rooted conviction that America was uniquely idealistic among the nations of the world. For America to follow the path taken by the great powers of Europe would be an act of national self-betrayal. Necessary to this belief was a refusal to acknowledge those acts of seizure and of annihilation that proved necessary to the nation's very founding, and to its amazing growth into a world power. With an irony that he has every reason to enjoy, the Spanish-born Santayana, who in his Harvard days had been friendly with both Norton and James, elegantly demolished the sentimental illusions of the American anti-imperialists, and then compounded the irony by rising in defense of America's celebration of itself as a power on the world scene. In *Persons and Places*, the memoir that began to appear in 1944, Santayana writes, with a kind of triumphant derision, that James

> cried disconsolately that he had lost his country, when his country, just beginning to play its part in the history of the world, appeared to ignore an ideal that he had innocently expected would always guide it, because this ideal *had* been eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence. But the Declaration of Independence was a piece of literature, a salad of illusions.... The American Colonies were rehearsing independence and were ready for it; that was what gave their declaration of their independence timeliness and political weight. In 1898 the United States were rehearsing domination over tropical America and were ready to organize and to legalise it; it served their commercial and military interests and their imaginative passions. Such antecedents and such facilities made intervention sooner or later inevitable.... James's displeasure at the seizure of the Philippines was therefore, from my point of view, merely accidental. It did not indicate any sympathy with Spain, or with anything in history that interests and delights me. On the contrary, it was an expression of principles entirely opposed to mine; much more so than the impulses of young, ambitious, enterprising America.

SANTAYANA'S PROSE, COMING after a heavy dose of Norton's, is immensely invigorating. It shows the intellectual precision and wit of a man whose personality is complexly but fully engaged by what he is saying. He has no truck with those solemnities of phrasing designed to persuade a writer and his readers that he really is a very serious fellow. A particularly disastrous example is to be found in a lecture by Norton called "True Patriotism," summarizing for a public audience the advice that he had been offering Harvard students on how they might conduct themselves in response to the American declaration of war against Spain. The address, which was given in early June 1898, is accorded the

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full endorsement and the signal honor of being one of the few such items included by his editors—one of whom, again, was his daughter Sara—in the second volume of the *Letters*:

> [so] long as the safety of the State is not at risk, the duty of the good citizen is certain. He is to help provide the administration responsible for the conduct of the war with every means that may serve to bring it to the speediest end. He is to do this alike that the immediate evils of war may be brief and as few as possible, and also that the miserable train of after evils may be diminished and the vicious passions excited by it be the sooner allayed. Men, money must be abundantly supplied. But must he himself enlist or quicken the ardent youth to enter service in such cause? The need is not yet. The country is in no peril. There is always in a vast population like ours an immense, a sufficient supply of material of a fighting order, often of heroic courage, ready and eager for the excitement of battle, filled with the old notion that patriotism is best expressed in a readiness to fight for our country, be she right or wrong. Better the paying of bounties to such men to fill the ranks than they should be filled by those [he means the students] whose higher duty is to fit themselves for the service of their country in the patriotic labors of peace. We mourn the deaths of our noble youth fallen in the cause of their country when she stands for the right; but we mourn with a deeper sadness for those who have fallen in a cause which their generous hearts mistook for one worthy of the last sacrifice.

Norton's opposition to the war was widely reported, and severely criticized in the press and by Harvard alumni. Along with a number of threatening letters, he received a personally hurtful reproof from Senator George Hoar, a friend and sometime dinner companion at the Saturday Club in Boston. Norton, the senator alleged, had become "bad for the college, and bad for the youth of the country." He meant essentially that Norton had failed in his patriotic duty.

What Hoar, as a Harvard alumnus, might better have complained about was that Norton, in articulating his arguments against the war and in his advice to students on how they might respond to it, failed intellectually and morally not in his patriotic duties but in his professorial responsibilities. He offered his pupils an example of utterly confused thinking, of obfuscation and posturing. Those are the very things that for over twenty years he had been warning them against. The passage just quoted is a jumble of illogic, culminating in the unctuousness of that final sentence, with its bathetic evocation of young men—men of college age who could not go to college—with "generous hearts," all of them "worthy of the last sacrifice." Worthy, that is, to be killed while fighting, in some cases presumably as paid substitutes for one or another of those Harvard students who might try to take Norton's misleading advice.

IT WAS GRATUITOUS of Norton to argue that the war is "criminal" while at the same time counseling his audience that they must help ensure the supply of all the money and manpower needed for a quick victory, as if the quick success of a "criminal" act of aggression will necessarily assure any diminished suffering. But what is the need or the point of such counsel? By his own admission, there was already an assured abundance of available manpower, and all the necessary funding would be enthusiastically appropriated by a war-rallying Congress. Norton knew full well, moreover, not only that student volunteers wouldn't be needed or called for but that there was no likelihood of a draft in a war that would unquestionably be a very short one. As he somewhat grossly phrases it, there is already on hand "a sufficient supply of material of a fighting order" who can always be counted on to emerge on such occasions from the lower classes, boys "eager for the excitement of battle."

Are they? How would he know? How could he discern or understand that whatever the eagerness of working-class boys to enlist it is not necessarily an eagerness for "the excitement of battle." More likely it is a desire to get away from the tedious routines of twelve-hour workdays, impoverished homes, and, in some cases, big city neighborhoods that have taught them all they care to learn about "the excitements of battle." But assuming that they are indeed eager for battle at the front: why in that case will they require bounty payments? Does there in fact exist any provision for such payments?

Norton knew that there was no such provision and that there would not be one. As the founder and the editor during the Civil War of a broadsheet called *New England Publication Society*, which ran syndicated articles and reports favorable to the Northern cause, Norton would not have forgotten that the only previous enactment of a bounty provision in American history had nearly led to disaster. It was a provision of the Union Conscriptive Act of 1863, which was itself enacted only because especially severe Northern casualty rates had created an acute shortage of military manpower. Conscription itself was in fact nearly scuttled for the very reason that it inadvisably included the provision for payment to substitutes. "Rich men's money for poor men's blood," it came to be called. This inflamed already existing social grievances, leading to four days of rioting in New York in July 1863, with an estimated 1,000 dead and injured, and over a million dollars in property damage.

THIS TISSUE OF self-deceiving advice is offered to Harvard students by a man who had been exhorting them for years to "think clearly"—a favorite admonition of his—while promising that by the study and appreciation of the cultural works of antiquity, or of Niagara Falls, for that matter, they might acquire an ennobling sense of "beauty," of principled conduct, and moral obligation. He often despaired of success, but he never questioned the legitimacy of arguments as ludicrously framed as these are. And just how ludicrous his arguments could be on the subject of war is dismayingly evident in his pronouncements on the course and the duration of the Civil War.

Norton was strongly in favor of the war as the only way to abolish slavery. Even more, however, he looked upon the fighting itself as a necessary purgatorial experience for the nation as a whole, including the Northern states. This required suffering, and, more crucially from his point of view, a prolongation of suffering and adversity. Only this could correct the enfeebling consequences of forty years of prosperity and of the self-indulgences that went with it.

Norton had no need to worry that a long national bloodletting might directly affect members of his own immediate family. All of them were comfortably situated, pursuing their civilian interests, far from any scene of battle. Meanwhile, suffering enough was being visited on the families of neighbors and close friends: Lowell's nephew was killed and another was gravely wounded in battle; Wendell Holmes's son was wounded; Charles Russell Lowell was killed at Cedar Creek, as was the brother of Norton's beloved friend and college classmate George Curtis, who was killed leading his regiment in December 1862 at Fredericksburg, the most senseless slaughter of Union troops in the entire war.

On hearing the news of his brother's death, Curtis may well have recalled an article of Norton's that had appeared the year before, in 1861, in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The piece was called "The Advantages of Defeat." This was Norton's response to the humiliating rout of Union troops at Bull Run. And Curtis, in December 1862, would surely remember the appalling letter he had received from Nor-

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ton in May of the same year. "I can hardly help wishing that the war might go on and on," Norton wrote, "till it brought us suffering and sorrow enough to quicken our conscience and cleanse our hearts."

In such a sentence, and others like it, what possibly can a man of Norton's position and disposition mean by references to "us," as in his expressed hope that the war will "bring us suffering"? In his writing there are never the sounds, the inflections, the caring details of someone willing to get and stay personally close to those things he is recommending to and for others, be it particular works of art or particular people, even members of his own family, or the concepts that he tosses about, such as "beauty" and "truth" and "nobility." When Norton asks for a prolongation of suffering, he speaks not only as a would-be cultural representative of the Puritans in their embrace of spiritual agony, but of the medieval Church. In his *Historical Studies of Church-Building in the Middle Ages* he becomes uncommonly eloquent when observing that "while the prelate and priest might be partakers in violence and partners in sin," the medieval Church itself "remained pure, steadfastly upholding the power of righteousness, preaching the coming of the Lord to judge the earth, asserting her claim to loose and bind, and vindicating it with the blood of confessors and martyrs"—a bit, it can be supposed, like Charles Eliot Norton himself. ■

History Train

By RICHARD WHITE

Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad by David Haward Bain

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"I DOUBT IF any large work was ever done before, since the world was made, that had as little thought and attention as the C.P.R.R. Co. has had." Or so Collis P. Huntington wrote to Mark Hopkins two years after the completion of the first transcontinental railroad. Huntington had reason to know. He and Hopkins were two of the Big Four (they were really five) who supervised the building of the Central Pacific Railroad. If Huntington exaggerated, it was only in slighting the amount of thoughtlessness and inattention that went into the building of the other half of the Pacific Railroad: the Union Pacific Railroad Company.

Huntington himself was harsher on his own railroad than is David Haward Bain in his big book. Bain is no apologist for the Central Pacific or the Union Pacific, but unlike Huntington his gaze never really takes in the first transcontinental railroad in North America as a whole, let alone as an enterprise that might be compared to other enterprises. Instead his focus is on the pieces: the visionaries who dreamed of the railroad, the building of the railroad, and, most of all, the capitalists who organized and promoted the railroads and the engineers who surveyed and planned the road. There are also labor contractors and bosses, and Red Cloud, an influential Lakota shirt-wearer or war leader in the wars that threatened the building of the roads, and a vast, if largely anonymous, supporting cast of workers and Indians.

Bain has written by far the best account of the building of the Pacific Railroad, as nineteenth-century Americans called the first transcontinental railroad in the United States. Yet this is a very twenty-first century book about a very nineteenth-century enterprise. Just as so much modern American politics and culture now comes down to personalities, so the railroad in Bain's account comes down to Huntington and Hopkins, to Leland Stanford, and the Crocker brothers for the Central Pacific, to Thomas Durant and the Ames brothers of the Union Pacific. When Bain wants to get closer to the ground, he gets there with Theodore Judah and Grenville Dodge, engineers who dreamed of the roads or built them.

Although we live, as Americans have lived since Civil War and the railroads, in a country dominated by large organizations and complicated technologies, we also live in the age of biography. Large enterprises must be the result of large men and women. The building of the Pacific Railroad was in many ways a heroic enterprise, and Bain's corollary seems to be that it therefore must have been the product of if not heroic men, then certainly men who were larger than life: "crushing enemies, exploiting the powerless, building empires."

Compared to the present breed of West Coast millionaires, though, Mark Hopkins was becomingly modest. "I don't claim for ourselves the greatest genius for either, Rail Roads or politics," he wrote to Huntington soon after the completion of the road. "We do as well as we expect of ourselves. Many would do worse, and some would do better—very much better." And this sentiment of competent men working at, or beyond, the limits of their competence is present elsewhere in the Huntington and Hopkins correspondence. Bain's research constantly struggles against his emplotment of the story as a "men to match my mountains" epic. Bain's emplotment of the story as a "men to match my mountains" epic constantly struggles against research that turns up fraud, incompetence, waste, and pettiness far more often than great vision or heroism.

BAIN'S EPIC BEGINS with Asa Whitney, a failed merchant who recoups his fortune in China and dreams of a Pacific Railroad, and it ends more than 700 relentlessly detailed pages later with an epilogue that follows the fate of the various builders, particularly Collis P. Huntington, whose voluminous and frank (if not always honest) correspondence is a primary source for the book. As conceived by Bain, the Pacific Railroad began as a glimmer in the mind of Whitney, who lobbied in the 1850s to build a road to Oregon in exchange for a huge land grant, but was defeated by machinations in Congress, and by the sectional split that doomed the attempt to find a route acceptable to both the North and the South.

Senator Thomas Hart Benton is cast as the villain of this piece, venting spite upon Whitney, but his objections were telling. He demanded "surveys, examination, exploration" and said he would "never vote for giving hundreds of millions of acres" of the public domain to any man. Whitney had "put the dream on the national agenda. It would fall to Theodore Judah to make the dream a reality." Whitney and Judah are Bain's tragic heroes, who were "denied the fruit of their prodigious labors, despite the nation's incalculable enrichment."

In California, working on local railroads, "Ted" Judah's efforts to find a way to build a transcontinental road brought him

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to the Sacramento merchants whose core members eventually became the Associates of the Central Pacific Railroad and allied corporations: Collis P. Huntington, Charles and E.B. Crocker, Leland Stanford, and Mark Hopkins. In Bain's telling, he was a visionary set amidst "the noisome, scheme-filled climate in Sacramento." But the merchants were too much for Judah. They marginalized him, and he died in New York on a trip to find a higher type of capitalist.

BAIN DOES NOT exactly whiten the sepulchers of the Associates, but in an age that has rediscovered the reverence due to men of great wealth, he is circumspect in his criticisms. Bain has an eye for a good quote, and when he notices the San Francisco journalist who later described Huntington as having "no more soul than a shark," he signals Huntington's limitations as hero. Huntington, Hancock, and E.B. Crocker were formidable men, widely hated in California. Bain attributes much of the hatred to jealousy, and to economic rivalry. But the scorn and the ridicule between the Associates themselves are harder to explain.

Leland Stanford is a near-comic figure in Huntington's correspondence with Hopkins, the Crocker brothers, and others. "[T]his immensely stupid man" is how Senator John Conness described Stanford, but Hopkins thought Stanford's most significant key quality was his ability to compound stupidity with laziness. "He could do it," Hopkins told Huntington of some necessary task, "but not without more mental effort than is agreeable to him." Huntington, who attributed business fiasco after fiasco to Stanford, thought it "was not safe to do business with him or in other words trust him to do anything." Bain bypasses a vast selection of attacks on Stanford to settle for Charley Crocker's dismissal of him as "awful lazy and never attends to work."

Crocker, too, often appeared a ridiculous figure to his contemporaries. Later, when the Associates were very rich, A.A. Cohen, one of the lost nineteenth-century masters of vituperation, memorably described Crocker as a "living, breathing, waddling monument of the triumph of vulgarity, viciousness, and dishonesty." Bain is far kinder to him. He needs to be. Since no single Associate was heroic, Bain needs all the virtues that he can find among them to make them collectively heroic. Bain can afford to have Stanford play the occasional fool—he was a hopeless case, as apparently even his widow recognized in largely destroying his papers—but he needs the others to carry the narrative once poor Judah is gone.

But heroism is a comparative accomplishment, and this proves the salvation for Bain's casting. The Union Pacific serves as a kind of fun-house mirror for the Associates of the Central Pacific. Reflected through the men who organized the Union Pacific, the Associates appear as giants. Thomas Clark Durant of the Union Pacific was "an absolute genius of manipulation, whether it be of high finance or his fellow man." The only high roads Durant preferred were those on his railroad. Ethically, Durant never took a high road. When there was no low road, he blazed one.

Durant was not only calculating and shrewd, he was also extravagant; but his extravagance paled beside the aptly named George Francis Train, whom the *Louisville Courier-Journal* compared to "a locomotive that has run off the track, turned upside down with its cowcatcher buried in a stump and the wheels making a thousand revolutions a minute." Train had moments of brilliance, but he was also a buffoon, and his trademark became brilliant buffoonery. His great contribution to the Union Pacific was the discovery of the corporate charter of the Pennsylvania Fiscal Agency. It combined great flexibility with limited liability. Train bought it, renamed it the Crédit Mobilier, and turned it into the Union Pacific's construction and finance company. Owned by leading stockholders in the railroad, the company became a mechanism to loot the road. The Union Pacific paid the Crédit Mobilier far more than the actual cost of construction, although what that cost was neither Bain nor anyone else has yet figured out. These two were eventually joined by Boston capitalists led by the Ames Brothers, one of whom, Oakes, was also a congressman from Massachusetts.

The Union Pacific seems a hopeless place to look for heroes, but Bain finds Grenville Dodge, Union Army general, Iowa congressman and chief engineer for the Union Pacific Railroad. Dodge was a practical man of relative financial honesty whose first goal was to build a railroad that will carry freight and passengers efficiently rather than secure its builders the highest government subsidies possible. Bain can elevate Dodge by routinely playing him off against Silas Seymour, the Union Pacific's consulting engineer, the tool and the darling of Durant, who is in this telling, as he has been in previous ones, superhumanly incompetent, corrupt, and smug.

Capitalists, competent or incompetent, honest or dishonest, were unwilling and incapable of building the Pacific Railroad by themselves. The railroads, as Robert Fogel compellingly argued forty years ago, were an exercise in premature enterprise. They were built before investors were willing to invest in them. The market rejected the railroad. Except, as Fogel himself admitted, the investors and the markets were wrong: the Pacific road created markets and turned profits. The government, prompted by patriotism and bribery and ignoring the rationality of the market, saw possibilities that the market did not see. It funded the railroad by guaranteeing its bonds and making it a gift of a kingdom: millions of acres of public land in the West to be sold to help retire the debt.

THE PACIFIC RAILROAD was a mixed enterprise: it was built by private corporations that were subsidized by the government, which in effect loaned them its credit. The government did so for commercial and political reasons. The road was a Civil War measure designed to link the new Pacific states and territories to the Union, although it would not be finished until four years after the end of the war. The exact terms of federal aid were the subject of negotiation and renegotiations in Congress in 1862 and 1864. The carrot that got the two railroads to build so far so fast was the promise of government land grants at 12,800 acres per mile, including coal and iron and bonds which varied from $24,000 to $96,000 per mile, depending on the terrain.

The 1864 law allowed the railroads to use the principal realized from the sale of U.S. guaranteed bonds while the government paid the current interest on the bonds. How a sinking fund for the interest was to be established was the subject of epic court battles, but at the end of thirty years the railroads were to pay the government back both the principal and the interest. They were expected to do so from revenues, from discounts on the debt for the rendering of certain services to the government, and from the sale of the princely land grants bestowed on the roads.

The land grants have garnered the most historical attention, but as Bain makes very clear, it was the bonds that built the railroads and bonds preoccupied the men who built the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific. Land grants did not buy equipment, or pay crews, or provide the track that attracted other investors. Under the 1864 act, the companies could get two-thirds of the bond payment by merely grading, not building, each twenty-mile section; and the government allowed them to issue their own first mortgage bonds in amounts equal to the government guaranteed bonds, thus in effect doubling the railroads capitalization and reducing the government to a second lien holder.

To get the bonds, and then to increase them, the promoters of both roads eventually bribed Congressmen on a scale then

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new to the republic. Eventually it came back to haunt the Union Pacific. The Congressional investigation of the Crédit Mobilier implicated a future president, two vice presidents, one sitting, numerous congressmen, and senators. In 1873, the Republican Congress would, in its wisdom, censure Oakes Ames for giving bribes, but it censured only one Democrat for taking them. "It's like the man in Massachusetts who committed adultery," Ames said, "and the jury brought in a verdict that he was guilty as the devil, but that the woman was as innocent as an angel. These fellows are like that woman."

With the aid secured, the building began; and the bulk of Bain's narrative follows the various competing roads building east to west. Construction began in earnest in 1864. Initially, the Union Pacific was not even assured it would be the main branch of the Pacific Railroad, but it beat out its competitors. The triumph of the Union Pacific resolves Bain's complicated narrative into the classic story of the Union Pacific racing west and the Central Pacific storming the forbidding Sierras and building east.

The land that they were building through was not empty—although "empty" is the adjective that contemporaries often used. East of the Rocky Mountains, it was the home of both agricultural tribes such as the Pawnees, who also hunted buffalo, and nomads, most notably the western bands of the Sioux nation—Brules and Oglalas—and their Cheyenne allies. The building of the railroads is part of a larger tale of conquest and displacement that Bain rightly chooses to tell. For the railroads exacerbated the fighting with the Lakotas and the Cheyenne that would stretch on into the 1870s, ending only with the campaigns that followed Custer's defeat. The Lakotas and Cheyennes opposed the road, and the Pawnees protected the crews that built it. In stressing the Indians' resistance to the road, however, Bain overlooks the way in which their very resistance became a godsend to the Union Pacific. As Jay Gould later pointed out, hauling troops and their supplies allowed the Union Pacific to pay down the money it owed the government with services in kind in ways that the Central Pacific—which did not find itself the financial beneficiary of conquest in the same way—was unable to do.

The actual building of the road, with Chinese crews working from the west and predominantly Irish crews working from the east is an oft-told tale, but Bain tells it better than anyone has previously told it—though without giving us much that historians did not already know. Bain follows his characters (this is a carefully plotted book) as they finance the road, negotiate with Congress, lay track, and fight Indians. Bain writes very well and parts of the story, no matter how often told, are gripping. And yet he has a narrative problem. The railroad took five years to build and after a while laying a piece of track in Nebraska is not that much different than laying it in Wyoming. One greedy congressman bleeds into another greedy congressmen, one colorful hell on wheels railroad town becomes indistinguishable from the next. And so the story inevitably lags. The book is plotted as a race, but the race seems to take place in slow motion. Everyone—workers, promoters, engineers, and readers—is exhausted when the roads finally meet.

As a narrative, Bain's book is an epitome of popular history as it has evolved over the last twenty years. It borrows many of its techniques from television, particularly Ken Burns's documentaries. Geoffrey Ward, the writer of many of these documentaries and a fine historian in his own right, blurbs Bain's book, and it is easy to see why. Bain has made Ward's life easier. With its narrative closely bounded chronologically and told through the stories of vivid personalities, with a text full of anecdotes and colorful details, with its easily understood plot—Union Pacific versus Central Pacific—it is a book begging to become part of Burns's product line. It is almost genetically engineered narrative history: a headless chicken history, an animal produced not to be an animal unto itself but to be more conveniently turned into a TV dinner.

Working as a consultant on the series "The West," I came to be fascinated by the kind of writing that television demanded. Watching Ward refine and polish a narrative meant to be read on the screen, I finally told him that I thought I understood the secret. "It's all topic sentences," I said. "No," he told me, "there are not topic sentences. The picture is the topic sentence." Writing for television relies on the image. The word complements, burnishes, and explains the image. It turns the pictures into a story. It makes it seem as if the figures in the image speak. The camera loves a story, directors tell you, and people want to see history unfold intimately through the lives and the words of particular people with whom they can identify. Such analysis as takes place in documentaries is usually outside the narrative; it comes through talking heads. They break the narrative, raise questions, assert meaning. Talking heads, when they do more than tell stories, are often a jarring presence in a documentary, a reminder of what the form cannot do well. Many directors regard them as a dispens-

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able part of the product, and commercial channels not dependent on NEH funding often dispense with them entirely.

In adopting many of the techniques of the television documentary, Bain accepts many of its weaknesses and loses its great strength: its visual appeal. He becomes the prisoner of personality and anecdote. The book contains wonderful illustrations, but Bain cannot write the spare prose that serves Ward so well, because the pictures are not literally before the reader; and so he needs to write more lavishly and pictorially. He gives graphic descriptions full of contemporary quotations of the difficulties of the Central Pacific's route over the Sierras, of a meal in Chinatown in the 1860s, of Sierra snowstorms and the tunnels men dug to continue work during the winter. His prose strains and strains to replace pictures, but it often takes the proverbial thousand words to do so, and this contributes to the bloating of the book. And Bain has dispensed with the equivalent of talking heads, as if analysis in written history were an uncomfortable intrusion rather than a part of its very calling.

THERE IS LITTLE analysis here. In this book, there is nothing especially problematic about reconstructing this past.

I do not mean to say that Bain is uncritical. He has spent considerable time in the archives writing this book. His immersion in the sources allows him to dismiss stories about the building of the transcontinentals that have attained folkloric status. He mercifully debunks the story of Irish crews in the last stages of the building, when the two roads were grading their competing roads nearly side, setting off explosions that sent landslides down upon the Chinese with deadly effect. Still, his success in discrediting such stories does not lead him to wider questions about other stories. He never ponders how memory reconstructs a past differently than a historian in the archives reconstructs it. Instead he often makes these reconstructions equivalent. Things remembered a half-century after their occurrence are often given equal standing with things recorded virtually as they happened. Memory and history merge, and mess each other up.

Bain gains much of his narrative power from his use of personal stories to carry his narrative forward. Certain people come to stand for certain aspects of the railroad. This is not just his conceit. These people often framed their own lives this way. In relying heavily on memoirs, most of them written long after the events described unfolded, Bain seems to forget how crafted memoirs are, how they are narratives that often make the teller a critical figure in great events. Thus he relies heavily on Grenville Dodge's various memoirs about building the Union Pacific, particularly *How We Built the Union Pacific*. This short piece is a nice, imaginative self-promotion, and owing to the careful biographical work of Stanley Hirshson, Bain knows that Grenville Dodge is not to be fully trusted when his subject is Grenville Dodge. Dodge's memoirs have two wonderfully self-serving moments—almost made-for-television moments—that Bain adduces, despite the research of Henry Farnham showing that both are fabricated.

Dodge recalls two conversations with Lincoln about the building of the Pacific Railroad. The first is a prewar conversation in Council Bluff. Farnham is almost certain that this is pure invention. And he believes that the second conversation, during Dodge's supposed visit to the White House in the spring of 1863, also never took place. In Dodge's version, he was summoned to leave his command and go the White House; and there he persuaded Lincoln to make Council Bluffs the eastern terminus of the railroad and to amend the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 to get the road moving. Bain uncritically repeats Dodge's own accounts, but Farnham, who checked Dodge's diary and abundant correspondence, found that Dodge was not absent from his command at any time that spring. He could not have been at the White House to talk with Lincoln.

In a second, equally vivid story, Dodge described his discovery of what would be the Union Pacific's route through the Laramie Mountains. Chased by an Indian war party, he and a small group of soldiers raced down a ridge that "led down to the plains without a break." Dodge told his scout, "[I]f we save our scalps. I believe we've found a pass through which the Union Pacific can go." It is a wonderful tale; but, as Farnham notes, it appears neither in Dodge's journal entry for the day nor in his letters of the period. Instead, in his letter to his wife, he complained of the "tediousness" of his trip that day.

These anecdotes are not only false; they also distract historical attention away from the humdrum work of surveying and lobbying, and the complexities of actual decision-making. Such stories prefer to prove that their subject was at the very center of great events. They are just-so stories, which create events in order to impose meaning. They are an inevitable pitfall for history told through memoirs.

Bain's weakness for good anecdotes is so great that he deploys them even when they contradict each other. Thus, in the spring of 1866 the Pawnees are so enamored with trains that they spend their time riding the work trains up and down the new Union Pacific line along the Platte River. But on July 1, when the Union Pacific sends a train with government inspectors to approve the first 100 miles of line, the Pawnees are so terrified of the locomotive that they run off in every direction. The sources for both anecdotes date from 1923. And they are contradictory not only in their details, but also in what they seek to represent. In the first story, Indians are a people at ease with modernity, enjoying the mobility of a train ride; and so Pawnee life may not be consigned to extinction, since Pawnees seem able to absorb the railroad. In the second story, Pawnees become simple savages of the nineteenth-century imagination, representatives of the kind of doomed past that Currier and Ives used to represent in lithographs by having Indians hurriedly fleeing on the margins as trains burst into the center of both their pictures and the continent. But Bain gives both stories, as if they were simply memories that open a window onto an actual moment in the past.

THE MOST SERIOUS problem of relying on personalities to carry a narrative is what this hides or leaves out. In many ways, the most mysterious thing about the railroads is how they were financed and how some men grew rich from them. The transcontinental railroads were the first large-scale example of American crony capitalism, and how the system worked is of much more than passing interest. The problem is not so simple as the looting of the American treasury. The government did not loan the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific enough money to complete the Pacific Railroad; and the promoters of the Central Pacific in particular were not rich men. They contributed little capital of their own.

The tracks shot forward only after the government allowed the railroads to issue first mortgage bonds in an amount equal to the bonds the government guaranteed. Both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific raised considerable amounts of private capital through the sale of these and other bonds. In addition, they borrowed large sums of money. Much of the debate about the transcontinentals, then and afterwards, has been about whether the government should have offered such aid to the roads, and about what happened to this money.

Bain recognizes this as a central issue. Since he relies heavily on Murray Klein's extensive work on the Union Pacific, he can give a fairly detailed account of that road's convoluted and corrupt financing. Yet the Central Pacific is a more difficult case. Even if Bain wanted to do a more straightforward economic accounting, he would have been unable to do so. In their

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What are the facts?

Indispensable for Israel's defense. The Golan, a plateau approximately the size of the borough of Queens in New York, has, since biblical times, been a part of Palestine. It was (in a great-power play) ceded by Britain to the French mandate, following World War I. When the French in 1941 granted Syria independence, the Golan became part of that country. It is not, as the Syrians like to claim, "holy Arab territory", of which not an inch can ever be ceded.

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Syrians shelled the settlements of northern Israel almost daily and made life there intolerable. In the War of 1967 (the "Six-Day War"), the Syrians treacherously attacked Israel through the Golan and almost succeeded in defeating it. It would have been the end of the Jewish state. Miraculously, Israel was able to repel the aggressors and to occupy the Golan Heights. The Golan has since then been integrated politically and in every other respect into the State of Israel. What used to be a wilderness has become, under Israeli administration, a successful province, with prospering cities and flourishing agriculture. But most important of all: The Golan is totally indispensable for the defense of Israel.

That makes it incomprehensible why our President, who, like the American people, is interested in the survival of Israel, presses that country to relinquish the Golan. Without the Golan, and with the Golan in the hands of those whose death wish for Israel has never been abandoned, Israel would be indefensible.

Never in the history of the world has a defeated aggressor successfully insisted that territories lost during its aggression be returned to it before being willing to make peace with the victor. Germany does not ask France to return Alsace-Lorraine, nor Poland to return the large chunks of eastern Germany that were allotted to it at the end of World War II. Why then the insistence that tiny Israel deprive itself of an area that is totally vital to its survival?

> "There is a way to make peace with Syria: Israel would return sovereignty of the Golan to Syria, but would lease the territory from it for an agreed-upon period. That is what the British did in Hong Kong and what we are doing in Guantanamo."

Unprecedented though it would be, an agreement with Syria about the Golan would be possible and acceptable to Israel if it would bring about *real* peace with Syria. But that is not in the cards. The hatred against Israel is so deep-seated that it would take progressive leaders and at least a generation or two to overcome it. Syrian newspapers and broadcasts are filled with venom and unending hatred against Israel. Schoolchildren, beginning with the earliest grades, are filled with poisonous invective against the "Nazi-Zionist entity". The official government line is that the Arabs (under Syrian leadership) must mass their resources to "liberate all occupied Arab land". And that, of course, is a code word for Israel. Israel must be eliminated.

Syrian "chutzpah". The gall, the "chutzpah" of the Syrians is almost beyond belief. Syria is a third-rate country, with a bankrupt economy, and – having lost the support of the Soviet Union – a second-rate military power. Still, in their dealings with Israel, they act as though they were victors and in a position of great strength. While Mr. Barak, the Prime Minister of Israel, appears to jump through hoops to "negotiate" with the Syrians, Syria's top man – the dictator, Hafez Assad – cannot be bothered to attend any meetings. He sends his number-two man, who is instructed not to shake hands with the hated Israelis and not to enter any discussions unless the Israelis agree beforehand to every demand the Syrians have to make. It is sad that the Israelis, being in a position of total strength, would consider such humiliating conditions.

In case any agreement on the governmental level were reached that Israel should return the Golan to Syria, such agreement would still be subject to a plebiscite of the Israeli electorate. Such approval should be by a super-majority – namely by a majority of all eligible voters, and not just by a majority of those voting. We in the United States are well acquainted with super-majorities for matters of great consequence, such as amending the Constitution. Could Israel be expected to divest itself of part of its country and of a vital strategic asset by just one vote?

There is a way to make peace with Syria: Israel would return sovereignty of the Golan to Syria, but would lease the territory from it for an agreed-upon period – 25 or 50 years. That is what the British did in Hong Kong and what we are doing in Guantanamo, Cuba. It seems to work out well, even for nations that (as between Cuba and us) are hostile to each other. During such time, one would hope that public opinion in Syria and in the other Arab countries had matured sufficiently for Israel to be able to afford relinquishing this strategic asset. For Syria to agree to such a settlement would be a positive step toward peace – proof of their good intentions. But, regrettably, the acceptance by Syria of such a solution is unlikely.

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understandable zeal to avoid a second Crédit Mobilier-style investigation, the Associates destroyed the books of the Contract and Finance Company, their fully owned construction company, as congressional investigators closed in. Bain tries to approach the problem by casting Hopkins as the "bookkeeper," and by making him the hero of the Central Pacific's high-wire financing. He pays considerable attention to the necessity for bond sales and the amount that they yielded. After a while, however, the result is that Bain's book becomes a kind of ledger. The reader is adrift in a sea of numbers.

Bain must reconstruct the financing of the Central Pacific from the letters, the legal papers, and the other remaining records of the associates; but his heart isn't in it. He prefers to linger over his stories. He is decidedly uninterested in reconciling those moments in any analytical fashion. A critical problem for the Central Pacific, for example, was raising the capital necessary to build the road before the first government bonds became available. The attempt to sell stock in the road was a failure. The associates borrowed up to their eyeballs, but they needed more.

The Dutch Flat Road, a wagon road to the mines that also served as a way to move supplies for the railroad, served as a source of initial revenues—and as a source of scandal, since opponents accused the associates of using the railroad as a subterfuge to build a lucrative toll road.

Bain says that the Dutch Flat Road eventually earned the company $1 million annually, which certainly would have helped with their problems in raising capital. Some sixty pages later, however, the road is generating only $24,000 annually; and with the railroad about to cross the Sierras those tolls would inevitably fall rather than rise. It is hard to imagine when "eventually" might be.

There are numbers everywhere in *Empire Express*, but they are dancing, decorative numbers that are never reduced to any kind of analytical order. Far more than a technological wonder, the railroads were a financial wonder—a tribute to the power of debt, paper, lies, bribery, and the kind of financial chicanery that, as Charles Francis Adams put it, made "'railroad financiering' a by-word for whatever is financially loose, corrupt and dishonest." For all its detail, *Empire Express* leaves the complexities of this "financiering" largely unexplained. In rendering a critical aspect of the beginning of the Gilded Age, Bain gives us the gilding and something more: the story of the creation of the infrastructure that supported both an American Empire and a new world of great and unevenly distributed wealth. But beyond the building of the infrastructure, he tells us little about either. And so *Empire Express* is a flawed, significant accomplishment. ■

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The Angel and the Egotist

By Brian Phillips

I.

Rilke was always frail: a pale and sickly child, dressed as a girl by his mother; a miserable cadet at the military school of St. Pölten, plainly uncomfortable in his stiff wool uniform, tortured by migraines and tormented by his classmates (to one of whom, a young boy who had just hit him in the face with a closed fist, Rilke replied, "I suffer as Christ suffered, quietly and without complaint, and as you hit me I pray to our dear Lord that He will forgive you"); a prim and awkward new husband, visibly smaller than his bride, the sculptress Clara Westhoff; a self-pitying aesthete during World War I, hardly able to bear his martial duty of part-time work as a file clerk in Vienna; a delicate *artiste* in his chateau in Valais, struck dead, or so the story goes, with a single prick from a wild rose's thorn.

In the stories, he was always a poet. The wind spoke to him. When he felt lonely in Paris, dry leaves skittered down the avenues; when he was anguished in Spain, stars fell from the clear night sky. He could be seized by love for women, such as the pianist Magda von Hattingberg and the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, who did no more than send him a letter; but he claimed to believe that the nature of love was abnegation—and that his poetry required freedom and solitude—and so he could never remain with one woman for long. His greatest works, the *Sonnets to Orpheus* and the *Duino Elegies*, seem to have been not so much written as received, arriving to Rilke in sudden, feverish bursts of inspiration in 1912 and 1922. Rilke believed that his poetry resulted from the interior transformation of the perceived world within the organ of his soul, and he lived his life as an attempt to prepare himself to accomplish the transformation.

The legend of the first annunciation of the *Elegies* to Rilke is particularly characteristic of the way he seemed to draw his poems directly from the world. Wintering alone in the fortress-castle Duino—the sometime residence of his royal patroness, the Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe—which rises from rugged cliffs overlooking the Adriatic Sea near Trieste, Rilke seems literally to have been presented with the first words of the cycle. As the princess later wrote in her memoirs:

> One morning, he received a troublesome business letter. He wanted to be done with it quickly, and had to concern himself with sums and other such tedious matters. Outside, a violent north wind was blowing, but the sun shone and the blue water had a silvery gleam. Rilke climbed down to the bastions which, jutting to the east and west, were connected to the foot of the castle by a narrow path along the cliffs. These cliffs fall steeply, for about two hundred feet, into the sea. Rilke paced back and forth, deep in thought, since the reply to the letter so concerned him. Then, all at once, in the midst of his brooding, he halted suddenly, for it seemed to him that in the raging of the storm a voice had called to him: "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders?" He stood still, listening. "What is that?" he half whispered. "What is it, what is coming?"
>
> He took out his notebook, which he always carried with him, and wrote

Duino Elegies
by Rainer Maria Rilke
translated by Edward Snow
(North Point Press, 112 pp., $20)

The Essential Rilke
selected and translated
by Galway Kinnell and
Hannah Liebmann
(Ecco, 157 pp., $22.95)

Reading Rilke:
Reflections on the
Problems of Translation
by William H. Gass
(Knopf, 233 pp., $25)

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down these words, together with a few lines that formed themselves without his intervention. Who had come? And then he knew the answer: the god....

Is there anyone today who can hear this story without a skeptical smile? Anyone who can believe that the "violent north wind" dictated to Rilke the opening lines of one of the twentieth century's superlative works of art, or even that he really believed it himself? And yet the image of the poet standing on the precipice at Duino taking his poem from the Adriatic gale—along with the image of him collapsing, dead, after pricking his finger on a rose; along with so many images of Rilke as the archetypal transcendental poet—is exasperatingly hard to resist. There is something in the quality of Rilke's poetics, and something in the way we read his work today, that makes the legend obdurate; that makes his biographers prone to justify the existence of the myth of Rilke's life, even as they reveal the complexities of his life as it was actually lived. (Ralph Freedman's exhaustive *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke*, which appeared in 1996, is an example, protesting Marie Taxis's account of the annunciation at Duino while implicitly upholding it: "Many different elements went into the making of this complex mosaic ... but it is clear that Rilke underwent an inspirational conversion.") I doubt that anyone—no matter how poetic—has ever been killed as a result of picking roses; when Rilke pricked his finger in September 1926, causing his hand to become infected for days, the leukemia that killed him was already in its advanced stages, and he lingered for another three months. But the rose myth is still commonly cited in overviews of Rilke's life, not because it is empirically true, but because it is aesthetically convincing.

The myths endure because they are beautiful, and also because they confirm the claim to mystical authority that many readers find in Rilke's poems. The dramatic, transcendent voice that redeems joy from the "nightmare of knowing" in the *Duino Elegies* is, as Michael André Bernstein observed in these pages, that of "a spiritual pilgrim who, through his own painful experiences, has come to understand the true nature of love and who, in turn, can teach it to his readers." He was a visionary: a man who saw farther than his fellows, whose preternatural powers of intuition enabled him to transcend his own anguish, and emerge surrounded by perfect, ennobling truths salvaged from the depths of his soul.

Rilke's long popularity is based in part on what Bernstein describes as "his presumed wisdom as a guide to living more authentically." (Who wouldn't want to hear the north wind's voice?) In that sense, Bernstein concludes, "the impulse to probe the links between the life and the teaching is ... directly encouraged by Rilke's poetry itself." This is exactly right; but I think a final tendency not to probe the life *too* deeply is also encouraged by Rilke's poetry itself. For what we find in the life rarely gives Rilke the authority of the legend, and too many books about the seer of Duino are still too seduced by the myth to capture their subject in his unmythical human weakness.

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Rainer Maria Rilke and Clara Rilke-Westhoff, 1901

Again and again Rilke displayed qualities of bad faith, selfishness, and cruelty, which he always explained by claiming that he sought only to create the conditions he needed to write. When he was in the company of wealthy Catholic patrons such as the princess and the Czech noblewoman Sidie Nádhérny, he indulged in their condescending anti-Semitism, dismissing Franz Werfel as "the Jew, the Jew-boy," claiming to be repulsed by his "decidedly Jewish attitude towards his work." At the same time, he enjoyed long-distance friendships with Jewish writers such as Jakob Wassermann and Stefan Zweig; and a trust fund for his daughter Ruth's education, which Rilke employed to pay for more lavish hotel rooms, was provided by his Jewish patroness Eva Cassirer. Rilke allowed himself to be maintained by such wealthy friends, to the extent that, after he was drafted into the Austrian army during World War I (he tempered his initial enthusiasm for the war only when he was actually expected to serve in the military himself), he ran to Marie Taxis for help—despite the fact that both her sons were on active combat duty. And when his friends' influence got him assigned to a part-time desk job in peaceful Vienna, his self-pity nevertheless reached almost unbearable heights.

Despite his fragility and small stature, he compiled a truly remarkable list of lovers: the intellectual Lou Andreas-Salomé; the Venetian heiress Mimi Romanelli; the painter Loulou Albert-Lassard; the actress Hedwig Bernhard (who later died at Auschwitz); Magda von Hattingberg; the poet and journalist Claire Goll; the painter Baladine Klowssowska; the writer Angela Guttman, whom he abandoned while she was dying of consumption. In almost every case, Rilke encouraged his lovers to become dependent on him, then left them bereft and deeply in love with him; and in almost every case, he justified his actions with the claim that he needed his freedom to write poetry.

In 1893, Rilke became engaged to Valerie von David-Rhônfeld, a young girl from a wealthy family in the Weinberge district of Rilke's native Prague. Rilke allowed his "Vally" to fund the publication of his first book of poems, *Life and Songs*, with her own money, then promptly dedicated the book to a prominent baroness and broke off their engagement, citing a need for "freedom" and a fear that marriage would hinder his writing. When he did decide to marry, it was to Clara Westhoff in 1901—probably in part because her friend Paula Becker, whom he preferred, had become engaged to another man. Rilke and his new bride moved into a farmstead in Westerwede, where Clara very quickly

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became pregnant. Six months after the birth of their daughter, Rilke fled to Paris to work on a monograph about Rodin. From that moment, he abandoned all responsibility toward his wife and daughter. He invited Clara to share in an "interior" marriage that would preserve his freedom to write poetry, unhindered by any obligation to be physically present as a husband or a father. His subsequent behavior toward his daughter was truly reprehensible: he seldom saw her, but seems to have felt no compunction about funding his private expenses with the trust fund donated by Eva Cassirer to pay for her education. He needed leisure, he claimed, in order to write. He failed to attend her wedding, instead sending a long letter, addressed not to Ruth but to her fiancé, in which he justified his dim presence as a father with his "commitment to *work*," his "life's decisions ... made long ago." Ruth Rilke committed suicide in 1972.

If, today, a full account of Rilke's life makes him seem particularly contemptible—more so than the many other important artists who have behaved hurtfully toward the people close to them—then the reason must lie in Rilke's lifelong self-justification, in his pious claim that his wretched behavior was acceptable because it led to his poems. His argument, made piecemeal throughout his lifetime in dozens and hundreds of self-pitying letters, was that had he been a father to Ruth, had he been a husband to Clara, had he coveted the patronage of the wealthy less subserviently or been more generous to those who depended on him, had he let Baladine Klowssowska stay with him in Muzot or been faithful to Magda von Hattingberg, he could not have accomplished the interior transformation that allowed him to write.

His biographers, for the most part, have tacitly accepted this extenuation. Who, after all, would sacrifice the *Duino Elegies* to spare Magda von Hattingberg her hurt feelings? Yet the more one learns about Rilke's life, the more insincere the claim begins to seem; the further one reads down the list of his successive lovers, the harder it becomes to believe that he really didn't know that love would threaten his solitude. The invocation of the art as an excuse for the cruelties and the dishonesties begins to seem desperate, even cowardly; and the broader implication that The Artist enjoys a kind of diplomatic immunity from moral judgment is revolting. I can think of no other artist who was as insistent as Rilke in chalking up bad behavior to the requirements of his calling. Rembrandt never claimed that his pettiness and greed made him a better painter; Byron never claimed that his abusive treatment of his wife helped him to give *Don Juan* its bite. But Rilke claimed to need the money that he took from his neglected daughter's trust fund in order to obtain the leisure that his poetry demanded. In any case, how does dining in fashionable restaurants with fashionable friends prepare one for the poetic metamorphosis of the phenomenal world?

And more importantly: if we reject the myth of Rilke's life, do his poems suffer? When the poet writes, "We have, in love, to practice only this: / letting each other go," is his poem merely an exercise in self-justification? Too often, those who argue that the examination of history should have no bearing on the interpretation of art do so because they want to worship artists; and too often, those who argue that art should be seen only through the lens of history do so because they are uncomfortable thinking about art. So the case of Rilke poses the question sharply. If Rilke was a liar and a coward, then a liar and a coward wrote the *Duino Elegies*, and alleged that he was able to write them only because of his lying and his cowardice.

II.

There is a complicated unease at work throughout the *Duino Elegies* that has not been generally observed, or considered a fundamental part of the poems. The ten poems that make up the sequence are pallid with fear, anxiety, death, and impermanence, against which the poet clings to a kind of desperate euphoria, particularly toward the abstract, terrifyingly self-complete Angel to whom many of the poems are addressed. But because of their tone, their relatively sparse use of the first-person singular, and the circumstances of their composition, they are often treated as impersonal utterances, weirdly inspired and stemming from a source beyond the poet.

This treatment has been exacerbated by the presence of the Angel: it is easy to connect the "most radiant" figure in the poems to the voice speaking to Rilke out of the storm at Duino, and to pretend along with Marie Taxis that, somehow, the Angel used the poet simply as a medium, and used his fear and doubt simply as subjects useful in the delineation of universal truth. This is an absurd thing to think about a cycle of poems that invoke angels only to assert their absence ("Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' / orders?" the "First Elegy" begins). Still, Rilke himself encouraged and seemed to take pleasure in this line of thinking, writing in 1920 to his friend Nanny Wunderly that "ultimately there is only *one* poet, that infinite one who makes himself felt, here and there through the ages, in a mind that can surrender to him."

But poems are not written by allegorizing godheads from beyond the stars: they are written by poets. The Angel of the *Elegies* is a fictional creation of Rilke, and the violent north wind does not speak German. And what Rilke created—amid the elaborate interior landscapes of the poems, amid the tangled ancestral jungle of the "Third Elegy" and the ramshackle vulgarity of the City of Pain in the "Tenth Elegy"—is a cycle of poems driven not by invulnerable vision but by vulnerable feeling, by dread and pain, by human loneliness. The ten poems that make up the cycle are clogged with images and symbols—angels, women consumed with unrequited love, lovers, a newly dead youth, grotesque puppets, tumbling acrobats, sly and cautious animals; but fear shivers through all of them, trembling beneath the oracular posture of the poet.

Human experience as it is portrayed in the *Elegies* is a constant flux, in which inwardness, the interior experience of the world (the *Innigkeit* so fundamental to Rilke's conception of the artist), is dependent on the often traumatic outward world for all its forms. There is no idea or feeling in the *Elegies* that exists wholly independently of its physical symbol or its landscape. Yet the world of things-in-themselves can only exist for the individual observer inwardly, in the faculties of perception: "Nowhere, Love, will World exist but within," Rilke writes in the "Seventh Elegy."

> Our lives
> pass in transformation. And all the while
> the outside realm
> diminishes. Where once a solid house
> endured,
> some abstraction shoves itself into view,
> completely at ease
> among concepts....

This regressive experiential tension—the helplessness of inner experience to exist outside the forms of the outer world, which can exist for the perceiver only in the frame of inner experience—carries with it the threat of extraordinary damage to the self. For neither realm exists stably. Any change in one must result in a frantic and violent renegotiation of boundaries in both, a negotiation fraught with danger to the mind dependent on their relation:

> And we: Spectators, always, everywhere,
> looking at, never out of, everything!
> It overfills us. We arrange it. It falls apart.
> We rearrange it, and fall apart ourselves.
>
> Who has turned us around like this,
> so that

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always, no matter what we do,
we're in the stance
of someone just departing? As he,
on the last hill that shows him all
his valley
one last time, turns, stops, lingers—,
we live our lives, forever taking leave.

The desperate, headlong joy that Rilke musters at times throughout the *Elegies* can only be redeemed from the constant terror of annihilation ("For our part, when we feel, we evaporate....") by a total openness to the world and a total assent to it. He is most able to imagine the possibility of assent when he arrives at the philosophically untenable but lyrically beautiful idea that the world needs him as pressingly as he needs it—when he imagines that the world around him longs to be expressed:

What if we're here just for saying: *house*,
bridge, *fountain*, *gate*, *jug*, *fruit tree*,
window,—
at most: *column*, *tower* ... but for *saying*,
understand,
oh for such saying as the things
themselves
never hoped so intensely to be. Isn't this
the sly purpose
of the taciturn earth, when it urges lovers
on:
that in their passion each single thing
should find ecstasy?
...

Here is the time for the sayable,
here is its home.
Speak and attest. More than ever
the things we can live with are falling
away,
and ousting them, filling their place:
a will with no image.
Will beneath crusts which readily crack
whenever the act inside swells and seeks
new borders.
Between the hammers our heart
lives on, as the tongue,
even between the teeth, remains
unceasing in praise.

Of course it is this vein of assent and joy achieved through praise that can make the *Elegies* seem mystical in a somewhat predictable way—the mystical experience of assent reliably transforms pain into joy—and that makes the treatment of Rilke as an allegorical visionary poet a tempting indulgence. (Snippets such as "listen to the wind's breathing, / that uninterrupted news that forms from silence" have a certain *Dead Poets' Society* quality, and lend themselves nicely to photo captions on nature calendars.)

There is no doubt that passages such as "Between the hammers our heart / lives on," from the "Ninth Elegy," are often breathtaking. But the redemption of joy that Rilke finally achieves in the *Elegies* is much harder and much more complicated than the view of Rilke as a spiritual medium can comprehend, and it is precisely because it is so hard and so complicated that Rilke cannot honestly be seen as a visionary authority. For the experience of happiness in the *Elegies* is often premised not upon assent, but upon the near denial that governs Rilke's poetic confrontation with the most threatening reality of all: the fact of death.

III.

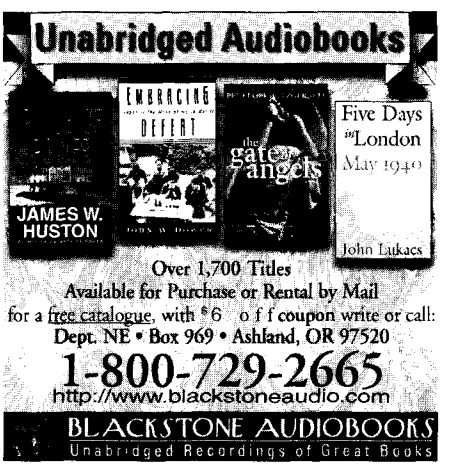
RILKE LIVED A life full of evasions and betrayals, and it is no surprise that, when confronted by illness and impending death among those close to him, he often responded with a self-protective demurral. When the poet learned, in the middle of a busy lecture tour in February 1906, that his father Josef was dying in Prague, he made no attempt to reach the ailing old man, instead sticking to his busy schedule of parties and speaking engagements, and even taking time out for a rest cure in the artists' colony at Worpswede when he caught a bad cold. Lou Salomé, who saw him in Berlin, wrote that Rilke seemed bent on avoiding the knowledge of his father's imminent death; and only after he received word that Josef had died did he set out for Prague. There, he dispensed with his father's possessions and saw to his burial before immediately returning to Berlin for his final lecture.

In the summer of that same year, Rilke enjoyed a close relationship in Paris with his wife's friend from Worpswede, the painter Paula Becker, whose engagement to Otto Modersohn had probably hastened Rilke's proposal to Clara. Paula had left her husband, also a painter, in order to achieve her autonomy as an artist, a move that Rilke encouraged and even considered exemplary, despite the extraordinary risk that it represented for Paula, who had no income and no means of support. Rilke spent time with Paula, who painted his portrait, and took pleasure in writing to her about the nobility of her quest for self-determination. They may have become lovers. But whenever she needed real support—when her money ran out, or when her husband descended upon Paris determined to take her back, as he did in 1907—Rilke vanished from her life.

Finally Paula had no choice but to return to her husband at Worpswede. She quickly became pregnant by him, gave birth to a daughter, and died. Rilke reacted almost not at all, but a year later he wrote a poem for her, the "Requiem for a Friend," in which he transformed Paula the woman into an emblematic figure representing the plight of the artist: Rilke's own plight. (He had transformed the occasion of his father's very unpoetic death into an earlier work called "Requiem for the Poet.") In his poem for Paula, he blamed "man" for her death.

In the "Requiem," Rilke treated his dead friend as a ghost essentially indistinguishable from a living person. By the time of the *Elegies*, he was almost pathologically unable to acknowledge *any* distinction between life and death, treating them as two forms of experience that existed in fixed relation, and placing the dead inside the allegorical inner landscapes the poems describe, as though death were simply an acute introspective withdrawal. Requiem, elegy: these literary forms of mourning derive their power from the fact that life has an end, but Rilke's requiem and his elegies often seem more determined to deny that fact than to mourn it.

They certainly make a show of assenting to change and to death, and of praising them to the Angel; but the kind of assent that Rilke provides often rigs the question, treating death neither as a transformation nor as an annihilation, but rather simply as an irrevocable move to another physical location: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... Ah, but what can one carry across
into that other relation? Not the art
of seeing,
learned so slowly here, and no event
that transpired here. Not one.
The pain, then. Above all, the hard labor
of living,
the long experience of love,—
all the purely
unsayable things.

This seems courageous at first, bolstered by a stringency that refuses to indulge in false comfort. The "art of seeing" and the simple recollection of earthly events will not translate into the world of the Angel: one must carry pain, labor, the unsayable.

Yet the *Elegies* never consider the possibility that death might be something more or less than "that other relation." Their posture toward death, toward the actual, inscrutable, physical cessation of life, is ultimately one not of courage, but of avoidance. Thus the child in the "Fourth Elegy" carries his death in his mouth like the core of an apple, but he never actually dies. Thus the youth in the "Tenth Elegy" does die, but only to proceed into an allegorical inner landscape where he immediately sets out on a heroic quest, leaving the City of Pain behind, traveling beyond the Source of the River of Joy, and entering the Mountains of Primal Grief. Rilke treats death as an escape into the noumenal ego. People die; but these are elegies without a corpse.

I do not mean to sound puritanical, or to molest beauty with the strictures of morality. The point is not to judge the poet simply, but to understand the poems complicatedly. But the *Duino Elegies* have been misrepresented: they are less wise and less universalizing, and more personal and more difficult, than is generally assumed. A great deal of their misrepresentation has been owed to the myth of Rilke, to the legend of his self-sacrificial and sacerdotal being. But Rilke was anything but an inspirational figure; he was not a strong soul. These beautiful poems owe their real power not to the transformation of the poet's external world, but to the transformation of the poet's internal world, which was a world of infirmities and infidelities.

IV.

In German, of course, the *Elegies* exist as Rilke wrote them, and readers are free to form their own conclusions about what the poems are and what they mean. For readers of English, however, the matter is endlessly more complicated. The *Duino Elegies* have been translated some twenty times by some twenty different translators—around a dozen in the last two decades alone, since the Norton copyright on the poems ran out in the mid-1970s—each of whom must make decisions and sacrifices, and choose between scholarly fidelity and poetic effect, and, to a greater or lesser extent, choose the Rilke that they will present in their translation.

This, too, has contributed to the mistreatment of these poems as a visionary's philosophy rather than as a man's struggle. For it is as visionary philosophy—almost as a kind of charismatic solipsism—that the overwhelming majority of Rilke's translators have chosen to approach the *Elegies*. In this, they have been encouraged by the compoundedness and powers of abstract reification inherent in the German language, which, when one attempts to duplicate it in English, can lead to a disembodied, exclamatory sort of poetic utterance.

The most important early translators of the *Elegies*, J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, whose collaboration in 1939 was for many years the best of the very few available English editions—the other important version being that of the American translator M.D. Herter Norton—are overwhelmingly guilty of this flaw. In the description of the City of Pain in the "Tenth Elegy," for example, they turn Rilke's angular, morbid cartoon into a kind of fist-shaking apostolic declamation:

Strange, though, alas! are the streets of
the City of Pain,
where, in the pseudo-silence of drowned
commotion,
loudly swaggers the casting cast from
vacuity's
mould: the begilded ado, the bursting
memorial.
How an Angel would trample it down
beyond trace, their market of comfort,
with the church alongside, bought ready
for use: as clean
and disenchanted and shut as the Post
on a Sunday!

Subsequent translators have amended Leishman and Spender's excesses sparingly, and though their general trend has been toward ease of comprehension, they have done little to discourage the image of Rilke as a guide to the authentic life. The most popular English translator of Rilke is now Stephen Mitchell, whose version of the *Elegies* is functional, accessible, prosaic, and drastically oversimplified, constantly threatening to transform Rilke, in Christopher Benfey's words, into "a sort of *gemütlich* Kahlil Gibran." Mitchell reduces the rhetorical triumph of the first section of the "Ninth Elegy" to this short-winded construction:

Between the hammers our heart endures,
just as the tongue does between the teeth,
and, despite that, is still able to praise.

In recent months, the popularity of Rilke and of the *Duino Elegies* in English has accelerated beyond even its usual brisk pace. Three major new translations have appeared, each of which offers its own version of the Rilkean consciousness, each of which challenges, intentionally or not, the usual image of the luminous, numinous poet. Of the three translations—by the novelist and philosopher William H. Gass, the poet Galway Kinnell, and the translator and scholar Edward Snow—only Snow's is entirely successful. But each is interesting for its own reasons, and each casts some light on the question of Rilke's personal presence in the *Elegies*.

Gass seems to have had no trouble deciding who Rilke was and how his mind ought to be represented. His book is not only a translation of the *Duino Elegies*; it is also a protracted prose account of the act of translating them, and Gass delves into Rilke's biography to create a composite portrait of the writer whose work he has set out to interpret. He has two modes for describing Rilke. One is awestruck, reverential, in the tone of an acolyte describing a master:

> The poet himself is as close to me as any human being has ever been; not because he has allowed himself—now a shade—at last to be loved; and not because I have been able to obey the stern command from his archaic torso of Apollo to change my life, nor because his person was always so admirable it had to be imitated; but because his work has taught me what real art ought to be; how it can matter to a life through its lifetime; how commitment can course like blood through the body of your words until the writing stirs, rises, opens its eyes; and, finally, because his work allows me to measure what we call achievement: how tall his is, how small mine.

The other mode in which Gass describes Rilke is opprobrious, jaunty, and condescending, in the tone of a mildly disapproving father nevertheless amused by his son's absurd exploits—as when he describes the circumstances leading to the annunciation of the "First Elegy":

> Rainer Maria Rilke, that rootless poet whom we've followed like a stray for so long we know the smell of his heels, has been lent the off-season use of the Castle Duino by the Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe. The place is huge and stern, alternately menacing and boring, too austere even for a soul sold on

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austerity. Rilke, as sensitive to weather as a vane, also found the climate trying. Yet it was economical. It spoke to him only of work. Nevertheless, the poet would have preferred Capri. Duino it was.

THE FIRST OF these modes is pretentious; the second is trivializing. Rilke is not the Angel, and he is not personally "close" to Gass; but he is also not a character in *The Pickwick Papers*. Gass seems to think that by treating Rilke's life crankily, he can sidestep the question of romanticism and myth; but what he offers is simply a cranky version of the myth. The Angel still appears ("The *Duino Elegies* were not written; they were awaited"), but the soundtrack is a little sarcastic, peppered with instances of Gass's obsession with Rilke's physicality and with his body: he follows his indulgence in hero-worship with corrective asides about the poet's "humiliating" bouts of "handmade sex," about the "migraines that troubled one end of him and the hemorrhoids that pained the other."

It should be possible to return Rilke from heaven to earth without introducing hemorrhoids into the project. Even so, Gass's tone might be forgivable, and the jarring little errors and misleading omissions that mar the book might also be forgivable (Ralph Freedman does not claim that the rose-pricking incident occurred more than a year before Rilke's death, as Gass says he does; and when Gass writes of the young Rilke's embarrassing snub at the hands of Tolstoy in 1900, he neglects to mention, commenting on Rilke's audacity in visiting Tolstoy unannounced, that Rilke had met the great novelist before, on a trip to Russia the previous year, and been much more cordially received); but Gass's language is hard to forgive. His book is riddled with nauseating and idiotic coinages and phrases: "Kid, Kitchen, Kirk, Koffee in which to dip a Kookie: they add up to Komfort." He writes of the torso of Apollo, "its inoffensive little phallus like a bit of fatter pubic hair." "That *heilig-nüchterne* is one helluva word."

Prose such as this makes one very squeamish about actually flipping to the end of the book and exploring Gass's translation of the *Elegies*. And one would do better not to flip. In his translation, Gass's program for Rilke becomes clear: he intends to transform him not into a visionary poet, but into a visionary version of William Gass. There is no terror in Gass's *Elegies*, and no joy; there is some resignation; there is a great deal of crankiness in the Rilkean imperatives. For a man who earlier proclaimed that in translation, "What must not be given up, of course, is quality—quality and tone," Gass plays shockingly fast and loose with the German. There is nothing in Rilke's acidic, satirical description of the carnival at the City of Pain to justify this Gassian monstrosity:

> Especially worth seeing, but for adults
> only: coins in copulation,
> right there onstage, money's metal
> genitals rubadubdubbing.
> Educational, and sure to encourage
> multiplication....

If there is anything clever in Gass's fiscally wry reading of "multiplication" into Rilke's "*fruchtbar*," he loses it outright with that "rubadubdubbing"—a travesty of translation sickeningly adumbrated by the tone of the preceding prose—no approximation of which word appears, either literally or in tone, in this German passage; or in any work by Rilke; or in the German language.

Gass is not always so vulgar, but he fumbles virtually every significant passage of the sequence. In the crucial opening passage of the final elegy, written at Duino in 1912 and preserved unchanged during the following decade of work, Rilke expresses what I take to be the core of his commitment to his theme. Gass drugs the magisterial stanza into unconsciousness. No poetry remains in his version:

> Someday, released at last from this
> anguished soul-searching,
> may I sing an extolling song to
> the assenting Angels;
> may not even one of the firmly struck
> hammers of the heart
> land upon a slack, uncertain,
> or broken string;
> may my weeping face make me more
> radiant,
> each tear glistening like a new bloom:
> how precious to me then my tormented
> nights will be, and how deep my regret
> that I didn't more willingly kneel to you,
> inconsolable sisters, more willingly
> lose myself in your flowing hair.
> We squander our sorrows. How we
> look along their bitter lengths
> searching for an end, and see not
> their secret.
> But they are our serious winter trees...

Where to begin? "Extolling" fails to capture the frantic joy of "*Jubel und Ruhm*"; "not even one of the firmly struck hammers of the heart" is horribly bogged down; there is nothing of "each tear" or "new bloom" in Rilke's "*unscheinbare Weinen / bluhe*," and nothing of that line's invisible weeping in Gass's version; the contraction "didn't" is tonally out of place next to the rhetorical inversion "see not"; and so on, until the passage topples over the ridiculous phrase "serious winter trees," which, even if it were right for "*winterwäriges Laub*"—"wintering foliage" in Snow's more judicious version—would be tonally preposterous.

GALWAY KINNELL'S translation of this passage—as of the *Elegies* generally, collected in his new anthology *The Essential Rilke*—is far more apposite. Kinnell is a poet, and he has none of Gass's overblown excess, none of his blustery confusion:

> May I, one day, emerging from this grim
> vision,
> sing jubilation and praise to assenting
> angels.
> May no clearly struck hammer of my
> heart
> fail to sound from slack, doubting, or
> breaking strings. May my tear-filled face
> make me more shining; may my simple
> tears
> flower. How dear will you be to me then,
> you nights of affliction. Why couldn't I
> kneel more deeply and accept you,
> inconsolable sisters, or loosen myself
> freely into your loosened hair. We
> spendthrifts of sorrows.
> How we keep peering beyond them ahead
> into sad duration,
> to see if perhaps they might have
> an end. But they are truly
> our winter-enduring foliage,
> the dark green of our life's
> meaning ...

Any criticism that can be mustered against this passage must be mild, almost unmentionable after Gass: "*unscheinbare*," for instance, does not mean "simple." Kinnell worked on his translations with the writer Hannah Liebmann, a native speaker of German who has no doubt helped him achieve the precision of his treatment of the language. Even Rilke's wordplay on "*gelöstes*" and "*gelöster*" appears in Kinnell's "loosen" and "loosened."

The translation is almost letter-perfect. Why, then, is it so unmoving? If Gass's version is a spectacular failure, Kinnell's is a curiously modest success, so proper as to be almost prudish. One has the sense that Kinnell's Rilke is not quite excitable enough to have his visions. "Where once an enduring house was," he writes gamely in the "Seventh Elegy," "a contrived structure proposes itself." And later: "The modern age builds enormous reservoirs of power." Well, look out, world.

Kinnell handles gracefully many of the words and the passages that cause translators the most difficulty. He follows Leishman and Spender in expanding *Weltraum*—literally "worldroom," or "world-space"—into "cosmic space," and produces an almost comprehensible passage in the

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"First Elegy" with "the birds/ might feel themselves in the expanded air more inwardly flying" (*innigerm Flug*). In the "Fifth Elegy," he follows the usual reading of the word *Dastehn*, "to stand there"—that the acrobats from Picasso's *Saltimbanques*, on which the poem is partially based, roughly stand in the shape of a *D*, "the capitalized first/letter of *Dastehn*"—and preserves it as a German interloper in his poem. He is competent with the opening of the "Fourth Elegy": "*O Bäume Lebens, o wann winterlich*?" (literally "O trees of life, o when wintry?"), which he enlarges to "O trees of life, when does your winter come?"

When Kinnell does take liberties with the German, however, he is less successful; his risks often fail, leaving his Rilke sounding shrill. The word "*schriee*" in the opening passage of the *First Elegy* has foiled many translators, and Kinnell departs from the generally acceptable "cried out" with the inappropriate and somewhat cinematic "screamed out": "Who, if I screamed out, would hear me among the hierarchies/of angels?" Such a phrase does not quite convey the crushing indifference of the universe.

In these *Elegies*, the defeats are small, but the victories are often hollow. Kinnell's poetic talents do not much enliven Rilke's poetry. His version does little that has not been done before. It is a mild improvement on some earlier translations, a mild letdown from others; an inoffensive new member of a very crowded field.

As one goes through version after version of these ten poems, the question begins to gather force: why bother? Why do we need this or that new translation? With all the English *Elegies* that already exist, what is the point of the exercise? But here is Edward Snow's new version, and in an instant it banishes the question. His translation of the *Elegies* is the finest that I have ever read.

For a decade and a half, beginning with both volumes of the *New Poems*, then *The Book of Images* and his stunning *Uncollected Poems*, Snow has gradually been building a reputation as Rilke's best contemporary translator in English. His version of the *Elegies* should cement that reputation, and elevate it: Snow may be the best translator that Rilke has ever had. His *Uncollected Poems* did more than any other work to correct the myth that Rilke lived—as Rilke himself seemed sorrowfully to believe—through almost unendurable periods of creative drought in between his lightning-blasts of inspiration. Contrary to the myth of Duino, Snow's *Uncollected Poems* showed Rilke writing at the highest level in the decade separating the first annunciation of the *Elegies* from the second. And now his new version of the *Elegies* shows Rilke not as a mythic visionary retreading for the benefit of others the revealed path to salvation, but as a human poet who struggled with fear and doubt and pain, an individual who acted cruelly not solely out of a consuming commitment to his art, but also out of uncertainty and loneliness.

Snow's Rilke can be defensive; he is capable of remorse. Look at the difference in tone separating the three translators in this passage of the "Fourth Elegy," in which the poet, speaking from the puppet theater in which the poem is imagined, addresses the women he has abandoned. Gass is typically lumbering (earlier in the "Fourth Elegy," he hilariously addressed the puppet stage with an indignant "Hey!"):

> And you others, too—am I not right?—
> who must have loved me
> for that first show of love for you
> I always mislaid
> when the look which formed your face,
> even as I loved it, became remote as a
> place in the expanse of the world
> where you no longer were ... when I'm
> inclined
> to wait before the puppet stage....

Kinnell is more diffuse, simply sketching the outline of Rilke's German, and in too many words:

> And you, am I not right,
> all you who loved me for my first
> beginning
> of love for you, love from which I
> always strayed,
> because the space within your faces
> changed,
> when I loved it, into an infinite
> space,
> where you no longer were.... :
> when the mood takes me
> to wait before the puppet stage....

And here is Snow:

> And you women—aren't I right?—
> who loved me for that small,
> hesitating
> love for you I always veered from,
> because I felt the realm in your faces,
> even
> as I loved it, changing into
> worldspace
> where you were absent ... :
> what if I do choose
> to wait in front of the puppet stage—no,
> to *stare*...

The tremor of self-righteousness in that line of forceful monosyllables—"what if I *do* choose," with the subtle implication that the choice must be made to the detriment of the women addressed—is marvelously appropriate to Rilke's earlier "*hab ich nicht recht*," a kind of tonal compensation for the compacting of that line into "aren't I right," which seems to me an exemplary instance of a translator correcting for his sacrifices. The self-righteousness recalls Shakespeare—"No, I am that I am"—in its revelation of a consciousness goaded by guilt into forcefulness. The ellipses after the word "absence," in Snow's version, show the mind in transition from the soft, almost apologetic tone of the preceding lines into the startlingly assertive "what if I do choose/to wait... "

Snow's Rilke can be desperate, insistent:

> Oh, *not* for some dream of happiness,
> that premature profit of an imminent
> loss.
> Not out of curiosity, not to give practice
> to the heart....
>
> But because *life* here compels us,
> and because everything here
> seems to need us....

He can evoke rapture, as in his description of the angels in the "Second Elegy":

Poem of Comfort in Which I Am Powerless

I hold an empty tub
to the sky above your head
to arrest any ill-behaved stars
while you are a non-swimmer
in a boatful of dangerous crewmates.

Extravagant city!
where I run ahead and tape over some lights
on every block leaving you a beautiful spectrum
and half bent over behind you an alcoholic witch
takes a few things out of your pockets.

In winter with all the windows shut
I stare up into the white corners with my net
and if the bats come catch them
and if the goats come catch them
and if the ants come catch them.

Sarah Manguso

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Favored first prodigies, creation's
darlings,
mountain ranges, peaks, dawn-red ridges
of all genesis,—pollen of a flowering
godhead,
links of light, corridors, stairs, thrones,
spaces of being, shields of rapture,
torrents
of unchecked feeling and then suddenly,
singly,
mirrors: scooping their outstreamed
beauty
back into their peerless faces.

Compare Gass, who has nothing to match the breathtaking rush of "torrents / of unchecked feeling and then suddenly...":

Lucky from the cradle, Creation's chosen
darlings,
mountain ranges, ridges red from the
first sun's rise,
the pollen of a blossoming godhead,
crossroads of light,
corridors, staircases, thrones,
space breathed by Being into being,
shields of delight, storms
of uninterrupted rapture, and suddenly,
isolate,
mirrors, drawing back, as whole as an
echo,
the beauty that has streamed from their
face.

One of the criticisms of Snow's work in the past has been that he lacks an ear for poetic tone, that he brings a workable scholarly fidelity to his translations but not an instinctive facility for poetic effect. This book should put that criticism to rest. Snow understands the destabilizing effect that rhythm can have on poetic language, and he knows better than any other translator of these poems how to create a psychological presence with the implements of grammar and sound. His work stands the highest test that can be put to any translation: it would be a worthy poetic achievement even without the original to prop it up.

In one of the most puffed-up passages of his book, Gass—who is so aware of Rilke's shortcomings that he should know better—writes about the *Duino Elegies* that really "it's as if the Angels spoke them, because their meaning is not common, small or mean—earthbound—as most of our fears and worries are, most of our thoughts, hopelessly human as we are.... These are not poems, then. These are miracles." What Snow's translation accomplishes, I think, is to take the miracles out of the mouth of the Angel and restore them, as poems, to the voice of the human poet, whose concerns are nothing more and nothing less than earthbound: who is afraid to change, and afraid to remain the same; who writes elegies in part because he is afraid to die.

For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror, which we can
just barely endure,
and we stand in awe of it as it coolly
disdains
to destroy us. Every angel is terrifying.

Of course the *Duino Elegies* are not about Rilke the sinner or Rilke the victim; but simply by providing the best and most perfectly tuned version of their poetry, Snow makes them seem believably the product of Rilke the man. When he asks, helplessly, "why then / *have* to be human—and, fleeing destiny, / long for destiny?..." the question seems more than rhetorical: these are the words of a man who longs for what he flees. How much richer and more complicated is this arrangement than that of Rilke as a wisdom-enriched "guide to living more authentically"?

In the crucial first section of the "Tenth Elegy," Snow captures Rilke's hardest confrontation with the crisis of his epistemology of feeling—with the quandary that one must know the world in order to find shape for one's feelings, but one cannot know the world outside one's own perception, and so one must be helpless to assent or even to exist outside the phenomena of one's own consciousness. Rilke's grief in this passage is not due solely to this philosophical imprisonment, but it informs every word; it is one of the finest passages in Rilke, and Snow moves it into English almost without sacrifice:

Someday, at the end of the nightmare
of knowing,
may I emerge singing praise and
jubilation to assenting angels.
May I strike my heart's keys clearly,
and may none fail
because of slack, uncertain,
or fraying strings.
May the tears that stream down my face
make me more radiant:
may my hidden weeping
bloom. How I will cherish you then,
you grief-torn nights!
Had I only received you, inconsolable
sisters,
on more abject knees, only buried myself
with more abandon
in your loosened hair. How we waste
our afflictions!
We study them, stare out beyond them
into bleak continuance,
hoping to glimpse some end. Whereas
they're really
our wintering foliage, our dark greens
of meaning, *one*
of the seasons of the clandestine year—;
not only
a season—: they're site, settlement,
shelter, soil, abode.

The nightmare of knowing is also the nightmare of having to know—of the precedence of sight over insight, of the dependence on insight of sight.

Was Rilke a visionary? Without risking an embarrassment of credulity, it is really impossible to say. What can be said, what needs to be said, is that out of the limitations and the terrors of human consciousness, and out of his own limitations and terrors, he struggled to lift these poems, and emerged with his evasive masterpiece, which cannot admit death, but can redeem joy from the fact of death; which cannot overcome fear, but can give awe-inspiring expression to the beauty that begins it. If "every angel is terrifying," then that terror is itself the strictest proof that the *Duino Elegies* are not the poems of angels. Their source is in the human imagination. They are poems for human beings. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 5

I'm tempted to ignore Peter Wehner's accusation that my dismay over Bennett's *Wall Street Journal* op-ed shows that I think it acceptable to demonize conservative Christians. For starters, even assuming I did consider Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to be "forces of evil" or an "evil influence" on the Republican party, it would not then follow that I view conservative Christians in general to be evil. (I believe the NRA leadership exerts an "evil influence" on the GOP, but I don't have a problem with most gun owners.) Moreover, my surprise stemmed largely from the gulf between Bennett's vehement denunciation of McCain's off-the-cuff "evil" remarks and his incredibly mild reaction to McCain's original speech.

As for my basic point that Bennett appeared fickle in his affections, I refer Wehner to a piece by Bennett booster Robert Novak in the April 3 *National Review* in which Novak commented on Bennett's "performance so far in the 2000 presidential cycle. He was initially impressed by Bush, then flirted, and traveled, with McCain, then drew back when McCain made his February 28 speech assailing Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell." ■

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SILVER SPRING DIARIST

No Way Out

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Maryland, where I live, is widely believed to have one of America's best public school systems. According to *Newsweek*, eight of Montgomery's high schools are among the country's most rigorous. Great—but not for my family. Seven of those schools are in the upper-income, predominantly white western half of the county, and the eighth houses a countywide science magnet. The schools near where I live—in the more racially and ethnically diverse eastern part of the county—are like those in many middle-class suburbs. They have special programs and courses for highly motivated kids, and for drug users and the disturbed. And the rest? Nobody pays them too much attention. Many barely learn algebra or English composition, and, when they graduate, are ill-prepared for either college or work.

I KNOW BECAUSE ONE OF MY DAUGHTERS and some of her friends fall into this category. Their experience is all too typical: they do well in elementary school; then, sometime around sixth grade, when they depart for factory-like middle schools, they lose interest and begin to coast. They are moved from honors classes back to regular ones, where they quickly get bored—and may get even worse grades. And the school acts as if they don't exist. Their advisers barely know who they are—"Could you spell that name for me again?"—and could care less. And, when a few devoted teachers try to help, they're stymied by school boards and administrators. At least, that's what has happened this year in my school district.

JULIE GREENBERG TEACHES MATH in eastern Montgomery County, and Bob Mathis teaches social studies. Joe Hawkins, now an educational researcher, spent 20 years coordinating the county's testing program. A year and a half ago, Greenberg, Mathis, and Hawkins began drawing up plans for the county's first charter school. Dubbed Jaime Escalante Public Charter School, it was to be directed to what Greenberg calls "the student in the middle." The trio knew Montgomery County's dirty little secret: some principals were disguising their regular students' lack of achievement by grossly inflating their grades. At Greenberg's high school, she reports, 89 percent of students in Algebra I were failing the countywide exam. But they still passed the course, because the exams counted for only a quarter of their grade and because a failing grade on the exam counted as 55 percent—even if the student got a zero. (To make doubly sure that almost no one fails, Greenberg says, the administrators at her school tell instructors they will be called in to explain their teaching if they fail more than a quarter of their students.)

GREENBERG, MATHIS, AND HAWKINS'S charter school, which would have been located in the eastern half of the county, aimed to get regular students to do the same work as their counterparts in honors classes. Their strategy was to get to the students in sixth grade, before the big decline sets in; put them in small classes (20 to 25 students per teacher), where they would be expected to do honors work; and require consistent parental involvement. There would be no tracking, no fancy learning technology, and no varsity sports. "If someone wants to set up a computer lab," said Mathis, "We'll tell them, just get us the money and we'll have smaller classes. Teaching is hard work." Admissions would be open, and if the number of applicants exceeded the 200 slots, there would be a lottery. But, before students applied, they and their parents would have to visit the school and learn what it expected.

LAST YEAR, THE TRIO BEGAN PRESENTING their plan to parent-teacher associations, which is where I first heard them speak. I was struck by their almost uncanny understanding of why some kids aren't learning. They proposed, for instance, to begin school at 9 a.m. rather than at 7:30 or 8 a.m., so that high school kids, who generally stay up until midnight regardless of when they have to wake up, wouldn't arrive at school tired in the morning and fall asleep at their desks in the afternoon. Many parents, including myself, were enthusiastic. So was the local branch of the National Educational Association. (The much-maligned teachers' unions are mainly worried about rogue schools that pay teachers supermarket-bagger wages. Jaime Escalante planned to employ the same union teachers as other schools.) But, when Greenberg, Mathis, and Hawkins, along with 15 parents, applied to the county for funding, they got stiffed.

FIRST, THEY HAD TO GO BEFORE A review committee composed largely of former school principals turned county administrators. Not surprisingly, the administrators didn't like the idea that anyone could run a school better than they could. The committee recommended that the school board turn the trio down. But a determined minority on the board insisted that the proposal receive more serious consideration, and the board majority agreed to hold two phases of hearings. In the first, the board would review the educational plan; in the second, it would review the funding, including the facility. But, when charter school supporters arrived at the first hearing, on March 14, the board majority broke its promise—and barraged them with detailed questions about money and facilities. The board members then voted five to three to reject the plan, claiming afterward that the county was "pinched" for money and lacked a facility for the charter school.

THEIR ARGUMENT WAS WITHOUT foundation. Like most counties in America, Montgomery is awash in funds; it had a surplus of about $150 million last year. The school system owns vacant properties, one of which would have been perfect for Jaime Escalante. And the schools in eastern Montgomery County, which are desperately overcrowded, need someplace else to send their students. What really seemed to bother the board and the administrators on the review committee was the charter school's unruly experimentation; it would have threatened the centralized, top-down organization of the school system. One influential board member even complained that charter schools were the first step toward private school vouchers.

THE REALITY IS EXACTLY THE REverse. Allowing charter schools and student transfers from the county's worse schools to the better ones (something currently forbidden in Montgomery County) would remove much of the political rationale for vouchers. By contrast, refusing even to consider, let alone fund, a charter school is the surest way I know to build support for vouchers. Take me, for example. I've always considered myself a staunch supporter of the public schools, but, after seeing promising efforts like these repulsed, I'm beginning to reconsider. Perhaps if kids started leaving in droves, the administrators, the principals, and the school board members might stop turning up their noses at proposals aimed at saving the silent, floundering majority that populates America's public schools.

JOHN B. JUDIS

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